

HEGEL AND HISTORY

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Edited by
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Introduction

Will Dudley

“History,” Hegel emphasizes, has a double meaning: it refers both to the course of human events, and to the writing that strives to comprehend those events and impress their significance upon human consciousness. These two senses of “history” are necessarily linked, according to Hegel, for the course of events transforms human consciousness—our understanding of the world and ourselves—and human consciousness informs the contributions we make to the ongoing course of events.

Hegel thus regards human beings as thoroughly historical creatures. What we are is determined by what we do; what we do is determined by what we understand ourselves to be; and what we understand ourselves to be is determined by what we have been. Our history—the events that have led to our present condition, and our awareness of those events—generates the possibilities we envision for that which we might become.

Our historical nature is manifest, Hegel thinks, in all of our endeavors. We actualize our self-understanding (“objectify our spirit”) in our legal, moral, social, economic, and political practices and institutions. At the same time, we express our self-understanding in aesthetic, religious, and philosophical forms. Our appreciation of the truths presented in art, religion, and philosophy makes our self-understanding increasingly explicit, which hastens its transformation. Our transformed self-understanding motivates further upheavals in the practical arenas of law, morality, social custom, economics, and politics. These intertwined developments of human self-understanding and its worldly objectifications are the stuff of history.

Hegel's philosophy of history aims to comprehend the trajectory and most important moments of human development. The key to such comprehension, Hegel claims, is the concept of freedom. Hegel believes that the capacity and desire for freedom are definitive of humanity, and that all humans therefore seek to establish the conditions in which they can be free. Because freedom can be understood in many different ways, however, people have produced a great variety of cultures, despite sharing the same ultimate goal. Hegel attempts to make sense of this cultural variety by ordering the possible understandings of freedom from the least to the most adequate, from those that grasp the truth only partially (or abstractly) to those that grasp it most fully (or concretely). He then identifies cultures that have actualized these understandings of freedom in their legal, moral, social, economic, political, aesthetic, religious, and philosophical endeavors. Hegel employs the resulting mapping of cultures onto understandings of freedom to define historical epochs. These epochs, he concludes, are constitutive of the historical process through which human beings have gradually come to understand the freedom that is their own defining characteristic, and in so doing have been able to achieve an increasingly complete liberation.

Hegel's account of history contains some of his most famous claims and formulations, almost all of which remain controversial. It is in history, for example, that the equivalence of the rational and the actual—which Hegel notoriously asserts in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*—is said to emerge. History reveals the actualization of freedom and, Hegel contends, everything that actualizes freedom is “rational” (despite the fact that the proximate causes of liberation are often accidental, violent, and even immoral). Hegel recognizes that human endeavors frequently make no contribution to freedom, and are sometimes positively detrimental to it, but he refuses to grant that such undertakings, though undeniably real, deserve to be called “actual” in the proper sense of the term. “History,” in other words, does not include everything that happens (no matter how important such happenings may be to the people who experience them) but is limited to those events that play a part in the actualization of freedom.

The fact that human development and freedom have been advanced by events causing intense and widespread suffering leads Hegel to refer to history as a “slaughter bench.” Within the apparently meaningless slaughter, however, Hegel discerns the “cunning of reason,” a colorful personification of the idea that actions often serve the rational end of freedom even when the people carrying them out have no intention of doing so. The cunning of reason is a secular version of the religious myth of divine providence, according to which the apparently incomprehensible

and painful course of events is in fact accomplishing the plan of God. By comprehending and bringing to consciousness the necessary operation of reason within the world, the philosophy of history functions, according to Hegel, as a theodicy, an account that reconciles the existence of suffering and evil with the ultimate goodness of the world.

The agents of reason, those whose deeds do the most to further the actualization of freedom, Hegel calls “world historical” individuals and peoples. In the course of time, they have inspired and led humanity to fulfill its potential for self-determination. Hegel traces the path of this fulfillment from East to West, asserting that the consciousness of freedom and its objectification in the world first appeared in Asia and then spread to Europe, intensifying in ancient Greece before culminating in modern Germany. Hegel refers to humanity’s achievement of an adequate understanding and actualization of freedom as “the end of history,” and the claim that history has such an end—in the dual sense of both a goal toward which it aims, and a moment in time at which it accomplishes that goal—is among his most controversial of all.

The chapters in this volume represent the very best in contemporary scholarship on Hegel and history, and collectively they address all of the important and disputed topics in the field. They are organized thematically into four groups, each of which concentrates on a particular constellation of questions and problems.

Part I: Past, Present, and Future

The four chapters in the first section of the volume engage, in different ways, the various interpretations and implications of Hegel’s claim that history has an end, toward which it necessarily progresses, and at which it has already arrived. This claim immediately calls into question the status of the present and the future in Hegel’s philosophy of history. If the actualization of freedom brought history to an end in the nineteenth century, what is the significance of that which has since transpired, is currently transpiring, or has yet to transpire? What, if anything, can Hegel contribute to the comprehension of ongoing human events and development?

William Maker, in “The End of History and the Nihilism of Becoming,” argues that a proper interpretation of Hegel’s claim that history has been completed leads not to nihilistic resignation in the face of closure and stasis, but rather to an appreciation of the openness and dynamism of the modern era. The end of history coincides with the beginning of modernity, with the insight that freedom involves radical self-criticism

and the rejection of unjustified authority. The implication of this insight for modern philosophy is that it must proceed without accepting as given any foundational presuppositions, which is what Hegel claims to have undertaken and accomplished in his own system. The correlative implication for modern life is that it must proceed without accepting as given any traditional prescriptions. Modernity demands a radical self-legitimation of the norms that justify thinking and action. The end of history thus marks, Maker contends, the onset of self-determination, genuine freedom, in both theoretical and practical endeavors.

Maker draws upon his interpretation of the end of history to make a case that it is Hegel, rather than Nietzsche, who offers a postfoundationalist philosophy that can account for both the becoming intrinsic to being (successfully responding to the challenge posed by Parmenides) and the norms intrinsic to freedom (successfully responding to the challenge posed by nihilism). Maker's view is that although Nietzsche is often celebrated as the thinker of postfoundational becoming, the will to power functions as an implicit foundation in his thought, and one that makes nihilism inevitable by undermining the possibility of legitimate norms. In contrast, Hegel's systematic philosophy and the end of history that it announces herald the onset of a truly modern epoch, one that secures normativity precisely by insisting that thinking and living be self-determining.

The relationship between Hegel's modern demand for the justification of norms and utopianism is the subject of Mario Wenning's essay, "Hegel, Utopia and the Philosophy of History." Wenning argues that Hegel appropriates utopian thinking selectively, by rejecting the longing for a transcendent escape from actuality while incorporating the conception of humanity as progressively transforming and improving itself. Wenning attributes Hegel's rejection of transcendence to his analysis of the French Revolution, which he saw as destroying traditional authority in the name of abstract ideals that proved incapable of regenerating and sustaining a concrete alternative.

Hegel responded to the failure of transcendent ideals, according to Wenning, by undertaking a "historical genealogy" of normativity, and ultimately locating the source of norms in the concept of freedom. Hegel then adopted the regulative hypothesis, Wenning contends, that history itself exhibits tendencies toward the actualization of freedom, which is what Hegel means when he says there is "reason in history." Wenning reads Hegel's philosophy of history as testing this hypothesis by tracing the progressive emergence of the tendencies toward freedom in particular human cultures. The resulting narrative then sanctions retrospective judgments that certain moments in the progression were

“necessary,” given the context established by the moments that came before. Wenning intriguingly compares such historical necessity to the necessity we often attribute to the progression of elements in a good piece of music, which he points out is compatible with the music (or history) containing surprising developments.

Wenning concludes that Hegel’s attempt to identify rational tendencies in history aims at enabling us to reconcile ourselves with it. Such reconciliation leads neither to happiness nor to quietism, in Wenning’s view, but rather to taking responsibility for history as our own, and so to a critical comprehension of the present that can give impetus to future reforms.

Karin de Boer agrees that Hegel is optimistic about our prospects of reconciling with the past, and that such reconciliation depends upon comprehending the historical moments in which the actualization of freedom has been advanced. In “Hegel’s Account of the Present: An Open-Ended History,” she argues, however, that Hegel is much less optimistic about the possibility of achieving reconciliation with the modern world. This is because Hegel acknowledges, according to de Boer, that modernity confronts us with economic and political conditions that might prove impossible to comprehend. Indeed, these conditions give rise to conflicts—especially those between poverty and wealth, individual citizens and the state—that threaten freedom with destruction.

Hegel calls for the development of institutions capable of mediating these conflicts, but acknowledges that their successful mediation cannot be guaranteed. Consequently, de Boer encourages us to understand Hegel’s stance toward the modern world as tragic: the institutions of modernity have actualized freedom as fully as possible, and yet they generate unavoidable conflicts capable of destroying both freedom and the institutions themselves. There is no escape from this predicament, de Boer concludes, because Hegel has demonstrated that no dialectical improvement upon the modern conception of freedom is possible. To be free, we must be modern, but being modern, we are always a threat to our own liberation.

John McCumber suggests that Hegel can comprehend some of the most pressing modern threats to freedom—including the cold war and religious fundamentalism—but only if we learn to employ Hegel’s approach to the philosophy of history independently of the particular master narrative that he used it to develop. In “Hegel and the Logics of History,” McCumber emphasizes that Hegel’s philosophy of history is intended to offer not an explanation of the mechanisms by which things have come to be, but rather a schema for understanding what things are. When successful, it enables us discriminate between those

features of phenomena that are merely contingent and inconsequential, and those that are basic and effective.

McCumber argues, however, that no single schema can be adequate for understanding historical agents and events, because such agents and events are always transformed by their encounters with that which they are not. Some of these transformations are sufficiently fundamental that they require us to change the categories we use in our attempts to understand the newly arisen phenomena. Consequently, the comprehension of history requires multiple logics, rather than a single logical narrative. Hegel's system nonetheless remains of value, in McCumber's view, because it offers us a rich and powerful set of categories, which we can deploy piecemeal to illuminate the events with which we are confronted.

McCumber proceeds to practice the method he recommends, demonstrating how the logical categories Hegel used to criticize Fichte's social theory can also be used to reveal the falsity of the alternatives that defined the cold war in the twentieth century. He then uses Hegel's logical concept of the "excluding one" to analyze the contemporary conflict between decisive individualism and submissive fundamentalism. McCumber's conclusion is that the future belongs to neither of these, but rather to the infrastructure upon which the preservation and expansion of freedom depends.

Part II: History, Geography, and Race

The two papers in this section of the volume undertake to determine whether Hegel's philosophy of history, which proclaims that the goal of humanity has been achieved with the actualization of self-conscious freedom in nineteenth-century Germany, is either Eurocentric, or racist, or both.

Andrew Buchwalter answers negatively the question posed in the title of his essay: "Is Hegel's Philosophy of History Eurocentric?" Buchwalter argues that Hegel offers a normative reconstruction of history, which evaluates cultures and events according to the extent to which they actualize freedom, and in doing so aims to cultivate an ongoing commitment to the practical project of liberation. This project, so defined, cannot accord special status to the modern West, or to any other particular time or place, because the only legitimate criterion of distinction is the degree to which freedom has been actualized. Hegel's reconstructive account of history thus attempts to identify the rational and irrational

aspects of each culture, those aspects that are in accordance with, and those that are contrary to, the requirements of freedom.

Although Hegel's philosophy of history cannot presuppose the superiority of Europe, it does of course conclude that European modernity actualizes freedom more fully than any other historical culture. Buchwalter points out, however, that Hegel regards freedom as universally and essentially human, not as the special prerogative of Europe. Moreover, Hegel remains critical of European societies, none of which is perfectly rational, and all of which pose economic and political challenges that threaten the freedom of their people. Finally, Buchwalter adds, Hegel understands freedom, at both the individual and the cultural level, to require recognition of the autonomy of others, and so to be a principle that demands mutual respect and openness, while precluding unilateral domination.

Sûrya Parekh grants that Hegel claims his philosophy of history is governed by impartial norms of rationality and freedom, but wonders whether geography and race are in fact merely contingent factors in the narrative. More generally, he challenges us to consider whether it is possible for philosophy to distinguish between those factors to which it attributes historical necessity, and those that it relegates to the sphere of contingency. In "Hegel's New World: History, Freedom, and Race," Parekh focuses on two particular ways in which Hegel appears to violate his own claim to impartiality by grounding historical judgments on considerations of race.

First, Parekh argues, Hegel denies to inhabitants of the New World the rationality that he purportedly regards as universally human. This is indicative, Parekh contends, of a metaphysical distinction Hegel presupposes between the Old and New Worlds, and upon which he bases his belief in the intrinsic inferiority of the inhabitants of the latter. This inferiority includes, on Parekh's reading, an incapacity for education, which makes it impossible for Hegel to believe that those born and raised in the New World could ever be rational or free.

Second, Parekh turns to two passages in which Hegel links freedom to blood. In the first of these, Hegel ascribes the impulse to freedom only to those native Americans who have at least some European blood. In the second, Hegel connects the failure of Catholic lands in Europe to accept the Reformation to the Roman blood of their inhabitants.

By bringing these issues to our attention, Parekh aims to place the burden on those who defend Hegel's impartiality to explain the passages in question. If Hegel's philosophy of history is neither racist nor Eurocentric, then how, Parekh forces us to ask, can it link ancestral

blood to freedom, or draw metaphysical distinctions between the Old World and the New?

Part III: The Historicity of Morality, Ethical Life, and Politics

The third section of the volume contains four chapters, all of which are concerned with Hegel's accounts of the ways in which the elements of "subjective spirit" and "objective spirit" undergo, and contribute to, historical development. The essays treat, respectively, the historicity of selfhood, moral imputation, ethical life, and political organization.

Allegra de Laurentiis, in "Spirit without the Form of Self: On Hegel's Reading of Greek Antiquity," traces the evolution of self-knowledge and subjectivity from ancient Greece to the Medieval and Modern eras. She argues both that the transformation of subjectivity is linked to advances in self-knowledge, and that it was just such an advancement and transformation of selfhood that led to the downfall of the Greek way of life.

The primary deficiency in the ancient Greek self-understanding, as de Laurentiis reads Hegel, was ignorance of subjective freedom and the ethical institutions appropriate to it. The Greeks therefore had only limited knowledge, based on intuition rather than concepts, of the truth of what it is to be human, and so failed to attain selfhood in the fullest sense.

This failure of the ancient Greeks is understandable, de Laurentiis argues, for Hegel demonstrates that truly adequate self-knowledge and subjectivity are intrinsically historical achievements, which could not emerge at such an early stage of human development. The consequences of this failure are therefore also understandable: Greek society made sharp distinctions of caste and class, on the basis of which it enslaved some and denied property rights to others, because it failed to recognize the universality of free human subjectivity. The ancient Greeks, and their chief philosophical representative, Plato, could see such freedom only as a threat to the success and happiness of their communities. This insight proved to be correct, de Laurentiis concludes, for the emerging awareness of, and insistence upon, the universal freedom of individual subjects proved to be incompatible with, and so helped bring to an end, the form of life in ancient Greece.

In "The Historicity of Ethical Categories: The Dynamic of Moral Imputation in Hegel's Account of History," Jason Howard attempts to determine exactly how Hegel understands the development of self-knowledge and subjectivity to take place. In particular, Howard is

interested in the role that moral imputation—the experience of being expected to fulfill ethical obligations, and of feeling guilt when one fails to meet these expectations—plays in these developments. Howard seeks to explain how ethical obligations and moral imputation contribute to the actualization of freedom, and so to the accomplishment of the goal of history.

Howard argues that, for Hegel, the conflicts individuals experience between their own identities and the norms that define their culture drive the transformation of self-consciousness, which in turn is the motor of historical change. Individuals experience these conflicts in the form of guilt, the feeling that results from self-consciously violating cultural norms. Guilt, Howard contends, can be sufficiently powerful to lead individuals to revise their self-understanding in ways that then generate widespread and fundamental change in the culture.

Howard supports his argument by considering two particular historical transformations that Hegel analyzes as having been driven by conflicts between individual identities and the prevailing cultural norms. The first of these is the demise of ancient Greek ethical life, which was catalyzed in part by the conflicts individuals experienced between obligations to their families and obligations to the state—most famously discussed by Hegel in the section of the *Phenomenology* devoted to Antigone. The second case considered by Howard is the rise of Europe, which was precipitated by the erosion of formerly stable traditional norms. What these two very different historical developments have in common, Howard argues, is a general dynamic, according to which moral imputation and guilt cause identity change, which causes cultural change, which ultimately advances the actualization of freedom, bringing history closer to its goal.

Nathan Ross, in “The Mechanization of Labor and the Birth of Modern Ethicality in Hegel’s Jena Political Writings,” examines the importance of economic processes to the historical transformation of self-consciousness and ethical life. The early Jena writings offer Hegel’s richest account of these issues and, Ross claims, the conclusions they draw are consistent with the later treatment of civil society in the *Philosophy of Right*.

Hegel understands labor, according to Ross, as a mechanistic force within the organic social whole. Civil society is like a machine in the sense that it is composed of individual working parts that interact to produce results at which none of those parts intentionally aims. Each free agent laborer seeks to serve his or her own particular interests, and only incidentally does such self-serving behavior contribute to the functioning of the larger economy. Labor thus isolates individuals from the common goals and universal interests of society.

Paradoxically, however, Hegel regards the mechanism of civil society as strengthening the social organism within which it operates, Ross argues. This is because certain processes intrinsic to a healthy economy also prove to enhance the ethical bonds of the community. For example, economic interaction teaches people to relate to each other as equals, qua producers and consumers. Such recognition of mutual equality then provides the basis for the emergence of the relations of right that are the core of ethical life. Economic activity also binds individuals together in virtue of the common interests that it generates: the satisfaction of each agent comes to depend upon the conditions that make possible the satisfaction of the others, since no one can labor and consume successfully unless the whole economy thrives.

Ross cautions that the mechanism of civil society is not always conducive to the health of the social organism, which is the reason Hegel advocates careful economic regulation. If the economy is allowed to become an independent sphere, treated as an end in itself, rather than as a component organ that exists to enable the flourishing of a free community, then economic rights and interests become falsely regarded as the ultimate social goal. Making such rights and interests absolute, on Ross's reading of Hegel, fosters and entrenches class differentiation, which undermines consciousness of the organic nature of the community.

Mark Tunick explores the relationship between Hegel's claims that the most rational form of political organization is hereditary monarchy and that his philosophy of history proceeds empirically. In "Hegel's Claim about Democracy and His Philosophy of History," Tunick questions whether Hegel's defense of monarchy and critique of democracy are in fact based upon, or are even compatible with, a careful empirical study of history.

Tunick notes first that Hegel deems democracy to be more appropriate for some peoples than for others. Indeed, Hegel regards democracy as having been necessary for the ancient Greeks, but as unsuitable for the modern era, in which a strong sense of individual interest has taken root. Such individual interest, Hegel worries, needs to be mediated by a concern for the universal good, which he believes democracy to be incapable of fostering. Consequently, Hegel concludes, a democracy of people concerned primarily with their own individual interests will fail to care adequately for the needs of the whole (and thus, ironically, will ultimately fail to care adequately for the very individuals who are attempting to care for themselves).

Tunick analyzes Hegel's conclusion concerning the incompatibility of democracy and modernity as resting upon two premises. The first

is that individualism fails to actualize the truth of freedom as fully as possible, which Hegel attempts to establish on metaphysical or conceptual grounds. The second premise is that modern democracies make individualism absolute, and therefore actualize freedom imperfectly. The grounds for this second claim are purportedly empirical, however, Tunick argues, Hegel's evidence is much too weak to support his case. Tunick therefore concludes that Hegel simply presupposes that modern democracy is based upon the principle of sovereign individualism, and fails to consider alternative forms of modern democracy that incorporate interests representing social groups of various types.

Part IV: The Philosophy of History and Religion

The two chapters in the fourth and final section of the volume investigate, in quite different ways, the relationship between religion and Hegel's philosophy of history.

In "Hegel's Philosophy of World History as Theodicy: On Evil and Freedom," Pierre Chételat evaluates alternative interpretations of Hegel's claim that the philosophy of history is also theodicy. Chételat argues that Hegel does not claim to have solved the classical problem of evil in the monotheistic tradition—that of explaining how evil is compatible with the existence of an omnipotent and benevolent deity—but rather to have shown how evil can be reconciled with the goodness of the world. Hegel does this, according to Chételat, by demonstrating that the world is governed by reason, and thus that history is not a merely contingent series of events, but a necessary development toward the actualization of freedom, which is the ultimate good. "God," on Chételat's reading of Hegel, is a religious term intended to personify the idea that reason is at work in history, and that the goodness of freedom can enable the transcendence of evil.

Chételat emphasizes, however, that transcending evil is not the same thing as justifying it. Hegel does not, on his view, believe that evil is justified in virtue of being a necessary means to the end of freedom. This position, Chételat points out, is neither philosophically compelling—because much of the evil in the world clearly fails to advance freedom at all—nor proposed in Hegel's texts.

Freedom can transcend evil without justifying it, Chételat contends, by enabling us to rise above our own particularity, and thereby to overcome suffering by accepting its necessity. Chételat distinguishes this position, which he attributes to Hegel, from Stoic resignation. The chief difference, on Chételat's reading, is that Hegel holds that the

blessedness of freedom, which is enjoyed through participation in ethical life, actually reduces the suffering we experience in the world.

Glenn Magee argues that Hegel's philosophy of history is deeply indebted to religious sources. More specifically, contends Magee, the central theses in Hegel's philosophy of history can all be found in the "irrationalist" tradition of Jewish mysticism. In "Hegel's Philosophy of History and Kabbalist Eschatology," Magee makes the case that important elements of the mystical Jewish tradition were inherited and adapted by Swabian "speculative pietism," which then had a significant, if largely indirect, influence on Hegel.

Magee traces the fundamental ideas common to the Kabbalah and Hegel's philosophy of history, and the intellectual path by means of which the former could have influenced the latter. The three most important shared theses identified by Magee are: (1) History has a knowable order with an endpoint; (2) The endpoint of history occurs in time; and, (3) At the endpoint of history, God is objectified in human institutions. These principles of the Jewish Kabbalah were incorporated in the Christian mysticism of Jacob Boehme, and then in seventeenth-century Swabian pietism, especially through the work of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. Magee emphasizes the importance of Oetinger to the development of Schelling, who borrowed from the ideas of his pietist predecessor in both his *System of Transcendental Idealism* and *The Ages of the World*. Hegel's awareness of this influence on Schelling is most clearly evident, Magee believes, in his famous declaration that "the truth is the whole," which is nearly a quotation from Oetinger, and is strategically placed in the *Phenomenology* to ensure that Schelling would get the reference.

Magee cautions that he does not intend to claim that the Jewish Kabbalah, by way of Swabian pietism, was the sole influence that gave impetus and direction to Hegel's philosophy of history. His goal is rather to demonstrate that these religious traditions were an important factor in Hegel's intellectual development, and that as such they are deserving of greater attention than they have so far received in philosophical scholarship.

Nearly two centuries after declaring "the end of history," Hegel remains a rich source of insights into our historical nature and its manifestations in every domain of human endeavor. The essays collected here interpret and develop those insights, while also challenging Hegel's philosophical approach to comprehend present and future phenomena that he could neither experience nor imagine. The importance of that open challenge ensures that it will be many years before the discussion of Hegel and history reaches its own end.

PART I

Past, Present, and Future

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1

The End of History and the Nihilism of Becoming

William Maker

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

—Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*

History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

Hegel's claim that history has ended and that he has comprehended this ending has generated considerable discussion. It is also among his more notorious assertions. For some, to hold that history is over and that final philosophical truth has been achieved must mean that a radical transcendence of human finitude had been attained; that we and the world are beyond time and change, and that Hegel, the Great Comprehender, stands omniscient as the individualized *telos* of history. According to Alexander Kojève, only when "the real dialectic of History is truly completed" with the "'end of time'" and "the definitive stopping of history" can "a Wise Man . . . named Hegel" lay claim to "Absolute Knowledge" which consists in revealing "being in the *completed* totality of its spatial-temporal existence."¹ Barry Cooper contends that Hegel's idea of "a perfected knowledge" necessitates "an end to the tiresome business of living as a human being." It is only achievable in an inalterable homogeneous state where there is nothing

significant left to achieve, where all desires are fulfilled, all possibilities are exhausted, and nothing can be gone beyond. The whole idea constitutes “an aggressive attack on human dignity.”² Stanley Rosen puts it bluntly: in offering us a “science of totality,” Hegel made the mistake of “confusing himself with God.”³ It would seem that nothing could be more arrogant, blasphemous, absurd, and indicative of the totalizing, authoritarian—and erroneous—nature of Hegel’s thought, then his claim to have articulated the unconditional comprehension of time, being, and truth. In opposition to this reading, my exploration of Hegel’s linking of the end of history and the completion of philosophy aims to show that his notion of history’s end and philosophy’s completion present closure and completion not as terminal finality but as inseparable from dynamic openness.

Part I outlines the interpretive problems associated with Hegel’s idea that history ends in modernity’s attainment of freedom. Part II argues that this attainment is linked with Hegel’s completion of philosophy in that both require a transformation of our relation to the past as what is given. To flesh this out, Part III presents Hegel’s completion of philosophy as a resolution of the problem philosophy inherited from Parmenides: what to do about nothingness as that which disrupts the given. This leads to my key claim in Part IV: Hegel succeeds in intelligibly reincorporating nothingness and completes philosophy by conceiving being and truth dynamically, as the becoming of self-determining freedom. The end of history is not a termination of our relation to the past, but a transformative reconfiguration of it. History ends as the new beginning of freedom. Part V critiques Nietzsche’s alternative posthistorical philosophy of becoming as will to power.

Part I. Historicizing the Eternal: The Confluence of Philosophy and the World

In history, we are concerned with what has been and what is; in philosophy however we are concerned not with what belongs exclusively to the past or to the future, but with that which *is*, both now and eternally—in short, with reason.⁴

Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it truly what it is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz., to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself.⁵

How are we to understand Hegel's claim that history has ended and that his system has comprehended this?⁶ This much is clear: according to Hegel reason and the real have come to coincide in modernity in that the world of historical becoming has been brought finally into accord with the absolute being of reason, and history, the succession of events involved in the struggle to overcome their separation, is over. The confluence of timeless philosophical truth and worldly events has been attained.⁷ The rational *is* now real and the real *is* now rational, and thus Parmenides' insight, that *logos* and being are one, is vindicated.

What does this mean? With some exceptions the prevailing approach has been to read the end of history and the completion of philosophy in a postdialectical fashion as predominantly signifying closure, termination, finality; it means the abrogation of the future and the inception of decline and decay. For, if the history of the world and of philosophy have culminated in the coincident attainment of humanity's practical and conceptual goals, must not this entail stasis, the end of all change and development, both in action and thought? It would seem that an end to change is necessary if absolute, complete, and final truth is to be attained, and further, that future change must be precluded if absolute truth is not to be relativized. Complicating matters is the fact that the completion Hegel envisions consists in the realization of freedom.⁸ How can the closure of a final resolute ending be reconciled with the openness of the human prospect and the potential for development and change which seem inseparable from freedom? G. A. Kelly, Raymond Plant,⁹ and Daniel Berthold-Bond find the completeness of history's end incompatible with the openness crucial for both dialectic and freedom. According to Berthold-Bond this incompatibility "cannot plausibly be swept away or '*aufgehoben*' by Hegel's notorious synthetic method of unifying opposites."¹⁰

Pace Berthold-Bond I will show how to reconcile the openness of dialectic and freedom with the systemic completeness that grasps how being and *logos* are one at the end of history. When we understand just how modernity marks the end of history and the opening for the completion of philosophy, we will see that Hegel's conception of absolute being and truth as self-determining concept means that systematic completeness is linked, not with the foreclosure of the future, but with a historically unprecedented conceptual and practical openness. In taking this view I am in general agreement with and have profited from the work of Richard Winfield, Stephen Houlgate, and Will Dudley.¹¹ What I will present here is intended to complement their efforts by indicating how openness is fundamental to systematic thought.

Part II. Freedom as Eternity: Historicizing Philosophy

Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself*. Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself without any possibility of escape.¹²

Free, philosophic thought has this direct connection with practical freedom, that as the former supplies thought about the absolute, universal and real object; the latter, because it thinks itself, gives itself the character of universality.¹³

Hegel regards modernity as distinctly philosophical and sees modernity and philosophy as intimately interconnected. Basic to their involvement is that both make the same claim to effective self-legitimation and presuppose what is essentially the same condition for their self-realization, a break from the past as an other-determining foundation.

According to Hegel, the modern world is uniquely philosophical in two respects. First, this world actualizes timeless philosophical truth in a manner distinctly different from, and superior to, other earlier approximations. Second, the modern world makes possible philosophy's completion of its own long-delayed task of articulating eternal truth. So the eternally true has now emerged, setting in motion the ending of history, thereby enabling philosophy to complete the emergence by demonstrating that and how modernity embodies the truth.¹⁴ The first step in that demonstration is Hegel's aligning of philosophy with modernity's completion of history. Understanding what Hegel thought philosophy had to do to effect the alignment will clarify what he means by the end of history.

According to Hegel "our age" marks the completion of history as the struggle for, and the gradual attainment and coming to full consciousness of our being as free. But as Hegel noted, work remained to be done to secure this achievement.¹⁵ Mundane events in the world had transpired in advance of philosophical *logos* (a view consistent with the *Philosophy of Right's* assertion that philosophy comes on the scene only to comprehend.)¹⁶ Aligning philosophy with the age meant appreciating that modernity's achievement of practical freedom also calls philosophy to achieve its own freedom by establishing from out of its own resources its rightful authority to speak the truth without qualification. Self-determination must be recognized not only as the hallmark of the achieved practical truth of modern society, it must also be real-

ized within philosophy as definitive of philosophical thought.¹⁷ When philosophy's realization of the truth of self-determination enables it to at last legitimate itself, philosophy will then be able to return the favor to modernity by showing that freedom is constitutive of both philosophy and modernity; that freedom is the essence of truth and reality.¹⁸ Before considering how it is that the truth of being and philosophy emerge as open self-determining, we need to see why both modernity and philosophy need an unprecedented self-legitimation, and how the legitimation involves philosophy's incorporation of the lesson of the end of history.

Both modernity's claim that justice is freedom, and philosophy's ancient claim to wisdom presuppose and require radical *self*-legitimation. Hegel's insightful linking of modernity and philosophy involved seeing that, for both, achieving self-legitimation involves a break from the past in the sense of rejecting the unquestioned determining authority of what is found *already given* to us: self-legitimation necessarily involves breaking from the past as a given determinative ground that can challenge the freedom of both practical and conceptual self-determination. In practical terms, the burden of history is the presence of the continuing authority of tradition, where tradition is the other-determining ground challenging the freedom of self-determination. The nightmare of history until modernity is the struggle against the heteronomy of the past. And since past history had yet to effectively acknowledge a right to self-determination, the right to challenge traditional social authorities and practices finally amounts to the right to challenge the authority of history itself. For freedom to be achieved *what must be brought to an end is the historical tradition of taking history—anything found given to us from the past—as an unchallengeable determining ground for the present and the future.*

For Hegel, modernity's need for liberation intersects with philosophy since philosophy too can only establish its ancient claim to articulate absolute, unconditional, truth if it rejects "the past," understood in the broad sense, as anything already found given as a determinative ground for the truth. If philosophy begins with anything it finds present as always already fully determinate, philosophy itself will not be able to speak for the truth as such, since whatever it asserts on the basis of such a given ground will be arbitrary. Philosophy will either have to simply assert the truth of the determinate ground it takes as primal, or move to an infinite regress of justifications.¹⁹ In either case, philosophy surrenders to an other-determination that renders its claim to speak for the truth incoherent, as relative to an unjustifiable ground. So philosophy and modernity must both reject other-determination, and the completion of philosophy conceptually coincides with the end of history.

In sum, if freedom is not just the achieved spirit of the age, but is more fundamentally the truth of reality, then only that which accords with freedom can play a legitimate determining role in the (individual and social) life of freedom. Freedom requires that we do not simply accept that who and what we are can be unreflectively determined by anything but the activity of freedom itself.²⁰ In this sense, history must be ended, for making freedom's self-determination effective requires a change in our active and interpretive relation to the past, in the broadest since of what "the past" is, namely, whatever we find given as always already fully determinate. Houlgate puts it succinctly: "Hegel understands history precisely as the passage from determination by given, external, i.e., natural forces, to free self-determination."²¹ How then does *philosophy* finally achieve self-legitimation and completion by liberating itself from its past? More specifically, how is establishing the truth of being as freedom the fulfillment of Parmenides' insight that *logos* and being are one?

Part III. Parmenides, Hegel, and the Problem of Philosophy

Parmenides began philosophy proper.²²

For philosophy to attain self-legitimation and completion by properly comprehending being and truth, what's needed first is a demonstration of the arbitrary character of beginning with determinate foundations, the arbitrary character of exclusive other-determination. In Hegelian shorthand, it requires us to move away from thinking being only as substance and not also as subject.²³ For, if no given can be shown to be authoritatively determinative as the ground of being and truth, then we may reject the historical predisposition to accept other-determination as inevitable, and consider self-determination as an alternative.

Hegel considers and rejects the assumption that all determinacy is foundational in the *Phenomenology* of 1807, the thinking through of what the end of history signifies philosophically.²⁴ Consciousness here follows what Hegel calls a path of despair in striving to prove that what it claims to have simply found being to be is just the same as what it is as demonstrably known.²⁵ When consciousness regards being as a given object, its every attempt to fully articulate its determinate nature causes this determinacy to fall outside of what consciousness had originally fixed as present to itself. Consciousness consistently fails in this regard because it unknowingly thematizes its act of bringing the object to consciousness as a heretofore unrecognized constitutive feature of the

given object; *and it must do this because it holds that being is just what is found present as what is already fully determinate.*²⁶

Locating Parmenides in this format will show how he initiated philosophy as the love *of* wisdom: a succession of failed attempts to show that what we take the absolute to be is just what the absolute is. This will also show why an overcoming of consciousness opens the way to the completion of philosophy.

Note that Parmenides' approach fits the framework of phenomenological consciousness. He too asserts the need to legitimate his claim that being is what is knowable by further articulating what the determinacy of being in accord with *logos* is, trying to show that being in itself and being for consciousness are one.²⁷ Whence the difficulty? In Hegelian terms, Parmenides' problem consists in construing the demands of *logos* in terms of consciousness. Parmenides attempted to think being minimally, and without further qualification, just in terms of its sheer knowability as a given object. For Parmenides, nothing else may constrain, qualify, or determine being save its being pure, complete, and undifferentiated *Gegenständlichkeit*: absolute being must just be that which can be construed purely and simply as what is already *fully* present to awareness, that which *totally* occupies intentional space.²⁸ Parmenides construed *logos*' constraint on what being can be precisely in terms of consciousness' understanding that being is a given object. He has the simplest take on what *always already present as fully determinate* may mean. For, when being means full presence to awareness, then being cannot permit of anything not fully present. This is precisely how Parmenides describes being: it does not permit of any break, disruption, or fissure; being excludes all nonbeing, where nonbeing means the absence or diminishment or interruption of all-encompassing, undifferentiated presence. Parmenides' problem emerges as he makes consciousness' move to demonstrate that what he takes being to be accords with *logos*: demonstrating that being *is* nothing but full presence—what consciousness *takes it* to be—involves articulating why nothing may be permitted to disrupt being. This very act thereby brings nonbeing into the thinkable and into being's determinacy. In phenomenological parlance, Parmenides compares two "moments," what is "*for it* the *in-itself*, and knowledge, or the being of the object for consciousness."²⁹ The latter moment is the contribution of consciousness acting in accord with *logos* to specify what *logos* demands of being as full presence through its active exclusion of nonbeing from the presence of being. However, just this activity on the part of consciousness thereby introduces nonbeing *as the other which it must, but cannot successfully exclude*. Nonbeing as absence or void must be excluded for being to truly be full presence, but it cannot be

thoroughly or absolutely excluded. It cannot be thoroughly excluded since philosophically demonstrating *what* being is as full presence, and *why* it must be full presence to accord with *logos*, requires consciousness *thinking* nonbeing as the excluded other, as that which *logos* excludes, thereby bringing nonpresence into consciousness' field of presence. This, however, gives it some status as being according to Parmenides' own stricture that what is thinkable has being. Thus, nonbeing makes its presence felt as absence, voided presence, so that now what needs explaining is *this* determinacy: the nonbeing that has some being, and that renders being fully determinate by its contrastive exclusion. In phenomenological terms we find that what Parmenidean consciousness originally took being to be—full presence—is not what it now knows it to be as for it, that is, as clarified by *logos*.³⁰ As this thinking exclusion of nonbeing constitutes Parmenides' philosophical demonstration that what he said being was is what it has to be, we see now that being is not what he said it was—full presence *simpliciter*—but rather full presence, which is full presence as the exclusion of nonbeing. As Parmenidean consciousness effected the exclusion, being turns out to be, in Hegelian terminology, the being for consciousness of the original in-itself.

The problem emerging out of Parmenides is this: when being and nothing are thought as given, and as already fully determinate each in its own right, and hence as absolutely mutually exclusive, neither is in fact fully determinate, stable, and demonstrably distinguishable from the other. Parmenides leaves us with a being infected with nonbeing and a nonbeing infected with being. In short, he leaves us with the problem of becoming.

Part IV. Openness and Closure

What has been said can also be expressed by saying that Reason is *purposive activity*. . . purpose is what is immediate and *at rest*, the unmoved which is also *self-moving*, and as such is Subject. Its power to move, taken abstractly, is *being-for-self* or pure negativity. . . . The realized purpose, or the existent actuality, is movement and unfolded becoming³¹

To say that spirit exists would at first seem to imply that it is a completed entity. On the contrary it is by nature active, and activity is its essence; it is its own product, and therefore its own beginning and its own end. Its freedom does not consist in static being, but in a constant negation of all that

threatens to destroy [*aufheben*] freedom. The business of spirit is to produce itself, to make itself its own object, and to gain knowledge of itself; in this way, it exists for itself.³²

How does the *Phenomenology* complete philosophy by solving Parmenides' problem and enabling a discourse that is complete in its self-determining while still capable of cognizing what lies outside of itself, thus involving openness even in its closure?

Parmenidean consciousness invoked the presence of an absent or not fully determinate other in its attempt to prove that being is already fully given presence. Parmenides' problem is an instantiation of what unfolds in the *Phenomenology* and illuminates the insuperable difficulty with foundationalism: the "foundation" of what is supposed to be the fully present, truth-determining ground is not present as a feature of what is given. Thus, as consciousness repeatedly discovers, an aspect of what is not fully determinate enters into what is supposed to be the fully determinate given. Every attempt by consciousness to bring the other to given presence fails because absolute being (full, self-subsistent determinacy) can never be reduced to a given determinate foundation in which all other determinacy is founded and from out of which all other determinacy is determined. Negatively, this demonstrates the error of foundationalism, which denies the independence of thought's self-determining and demands thought's subservience to some given other-determination.

What follows from this liberation regarding both the completion of philosophy and the end of history? (1) If logic completes itself as thoroughly self-determining and hence self-grounding, philosophy's goal of providing complete justification for its claims will have been fulfilled. This would show that only self-determining thought can establish its legitimacy from out of itself and further specify the specifics of the truth of freedom. (2) If this is achieved, the system is capable of speaking truth without qualification and parts company with the history of philosophy as the love *of* wisdom or the search *for* truth, by attaining what past philosophy had sought but not achieved: absolute truth. (3) As the system thinks what it means for something to be determined by itself, free from external determination, it can articulate the nature of what is, where this means that whose determinacy is fully accounted for by and from out of itself alone: absolute, self-sufficient being. But if absolute knowledge of absolute being has been attained, how does openness come into play?

(4) Since whenever being is construed as substance—that which stands *already* given in its self-sufficiency—its determinacy cannot be

accounted for, being needs to be thought just as much as that which only is as already other than itself, as subject.³³ (5) When self-determining thought has been freed from the predetermination that being exclusively means presence, logic begins by construing what is just as much as absence, or nonbeing, as presence or being. *Presence always already requires and involves negation, otherness, absence; nonbeing is implicated in being; neither can be regarded as a given that is always already determinate in its own right.* Thus, Hegel reincorporates the nothingness that Parmenides had tried to banish and whose shadow haunted the history of philosophy's attempts to finally fully grasp what being is. Giving equal weight to the role of what is other than what is, to nothing, in determining what is, is the key both to the completeness and the openness of the system and the end of history.³⁴ (6) As the beginning of the logic of being shows, when we no longer predetermine being by thinking it as what is already present, thinking being is immediately the thinking of nothing, or of the vanishing of a difference between being and nothing, in short, becoming. As logic and system are the self-development of this becoming, being is fundamentally dynamic.³⁵ (7) When this dynamic is thought through in the concept, we see the truth already foreshadowed in the logic of being: fully determinate, complete being is not exclusionary, all-determining presence, but just as much involves relation to an other. It is not something fixed and frozen beyond time, but the dynamic movement of a relating in which the identity of being with itself comes not from excluding or reducing its other, but by involving it as other in the mutually determining relation of simultaneous identification and differentiation.³⁶ So for Hegel absolute being and absolute knowledge consist in the active, ongoing self-sufficiency of self-determining, which is what it is through an open, nonreductive relation to its other. Full, self-subsistent determinacy is a process, a relational activity of ungrounded (hence, self-) determination in which presence and absence, what is and what is other, being and nothing are mutually implicated and co-determinative.³⁷

(8) Relation to other and openness are also crucial for completing logic. Thought can complete its self-determination only by ensuring that all conceptual determination is complete, and this requires thinking beyond logic to conceive that which is also determined in its own right, but in a manner radically and irreducibly different from logical self-determination: nature. Systematic thought must come to think that which is radically different from itself, and must do so in a manner different from its thinking of itself, just in order to guarantee that it has thought through and completely determined itself as thought. Our coming through logic to move beyond logic per se by thinking nature as that

which logic cannot include in, or reduce to, itself, is precisely how logic completes itself. Completed identity is attained through a nonreductive relationship of differentiation. A general point for Hegel and his system is that there is no completion that is not also an opening—to reach a true limit we must think both sides of it—and no ending that is not also a beginning. Reaching genuine completeness is inseparable from the recognition of that which is not included, and attaining genuine closure requires opening up to that which lies beyond and is other than that which has reached closure.³⁸ (9) The philosophical nature of truth can be grasped since the concept of freedom is timeless as the self-grounding truth about absolute being. But in the completion of conceiving truth as the dynamic of freedom, thought opens up to and points beyond itself. As *Realphilosophie* indicates, the content of the truth of freedom is the reality of an activity that lies outside of thought, in the given world. In addition, the actualization of freedom is not guaranteed by thought but requires action that is open and subject to disruption, to external necessities and contingencies beyond thought's control.³⁹ The *Realphilosophie's* conception of truth as freedom is at the same time the articulation of the limits of it *as concept*; the very truth of what it articulates as a concept points beyond the conceptual. What freedom requires is necessary and unchanging, but that we will continue to be aware of this, and that we will continue to will and act in accordance with what freedom requires is and must be open just for the truth of freedom to be actualized as freedom. The concept of freedom indicates that openness and uncertainty must be present because—among other things—*free* willing of freedom is required for actual freedom to accord with its concept. (10) Since absolute, timeless truth as freedom is irreducibly dynamic, the eternal emerges in time not as its end, but as a present, ongoing activity that relates to the past as to the completed, and to the future as the open condition of its possibility. As attained truth, freedom is infinite because the ground of its activity lies within itself, and because its self-constitutive activity continually actualizes itself in reaching beyond itself. It is timeless because the determining constitutive framework of the activity remains unchanging as the basis for its outward extending activity in which change is the realization of the unchanging. (11) The “absolute” of absolute knowledge does *not* signify “complete and all-encompassing” in the sense of the full presence to awareness of the totality of objects. Correlatively, the end of history does not signify the complete set of the totality of events, which would require the end of all time and change. Rather, as the truth of all genuine being is self-determination, history's end as involving this discovery means that for this dynamic truth to sustain itself, the

future must be open. History ends insofar as we no longer acquiesce to the necessity of heteronomy. From this vantage modernity may be understood and legitimated as the actualization of the eternal truth of self-determining in the active arena of worldly freedom. Modernity is the stage upon which self-determining subjects engage in creating the substance of their freedom, overcoming the heretofore unbridged gap between subject and object by becoming the subjects and objects of a new history, or story, of freedom.

Part V. The Nihilism of Becoming

Genuine philosophers, however, are commanders and legislators: they say, "thus it shall be! They first determine the Wither and For What of man, and in so doing have at their disposal the preliminary labor of all philosophical laborers, all who have overcome the past. With a creative hand they reach for the future, and all that is and has been becomes a means for them, an instrument, a hammer. Their 'knowing' is creating, their creating is a legislation, their will to truth is—will to power.⁴⁰

To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power.⁴¹

Nietzsche also saw beyond foundationalism, contending that there are no given anchors in god, nature, or reason which may rightly determine thought and action.⁴² Like Hegel, he regarded the emergence of this discovery as an unprecedented turning point for humanity, marking off the future from what had come before and opening the way to the overcoming of history.⁴³ Like Hegel, he saw the collapse of foundationalism as immanent in the philosophical impetus to secure truth; although for him the impossibility of foundational truth marks the impossibility of truth as such.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Nietzsche's philosophical response to foundationalism's demise was also broadly similar to Hegel's in that the absence of any fixed given grounds means that thought and being need to be conceived dynamically, as becoming.⁴⁵

However, the specifics of Nietzsche's philosophy of becoming as will to power differ radically in several respects from Hegel's notion of becoming as self-development. I will trace the roots of their disagreement about what follows after foundationalism, and also present an abbreviated Hegelian critique of Nietzsche, by arguing that Nietzsche does not fully

overcome foundationalism. He fails to offer a consistent and coherent alternative, falling back instead to postulate a new, quasi-foundation: the will to power as the condition of the perpetual negation of foundations. At its core, the philosophy of the will to power remains wedded to foundationalism even as it strives to transcend it and this undercuts Nietzsche's efforts to overcome nihilism.

Nietzsche's failure to escape foundationalism can be illuminated by noting that his justification of the rejection of foundationalism inverts Parmenides. Nietzsche's discovery that being cannot be thought as the fullness of presence leads him to think being as the *presence of the absence* of presence; in short, Nietzsche still operates within the framework of foundational consciousness. How so? According to Nietzsche, truth is a lie *because* there is no substantial, fixed, coherent reality, no world of given, knowable objects to which our ideas and terms refer.⁴⁶ As he goes to some pains to indicate, the reality of things—absolute being—is a state that altogether precludes the possibility of *any* already given, filled, stable presence. "The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos."⁴⁷ However, unlike Hegel, Nietzsche privileges nothing over being, and in so doing falls into an inverted version of Parmenides' difficulties. In fulfilling the *logos* of the will to truth by demonstrating that stable being as full presence is illusory, Nietzsche thinks the truth of things as the *presence of nothingness*; that is, as absenting; the unending destruction, disappearing, or falling away of presence.⁴⁸ This is the true nature of reality to which Nietzsche must refer just in order to substantiate his denial of the apparent reality of a world of stable things. Just as Parmenides could not fully exclude nothing, Nietzsche cannot fully exclude being, precisely because, to think the presence of nothingness (or nothingness as the true nature of what is present) *being must be excluded from that presence*. Nothingness can only be thought as present as that which excludes or negates being, a dynamic vacuum that voids any enduring content of presence; *the unending eternal dynamic of the disappearing of being*. As George Costanza might put it, "It's a show about *nothing*!"

This leads directly to the will to power as creative destruction. If there are no true *given* beings to be negated, they must be created by the same activity that then negates them. Furthermore, the aspect of the will willing itself as *power*, as the growth or enhancement of its willing appears, again, because of Nietzsche's inability to escape from thinking being as fullness of presence, even while rejecting that presence as stabile, fixed, enduring: What must be brought to full presence to capture true being is the unchanging—ceaseless—activity of the enhancement of the will as an overcoming force. For, the more intense and powerful this

activity, as constantly overreaching and expanding, the greater the voiding presence is made present. This also brings us to the eternal return of the same. Since nothing outside of this creative destruction may serve as an enduring frame of reference without lapsing into a foundational denial of chaos, every moment of the will to power is the same, as indistinguishable from every other.⁴⁹

True to his philosophical legacy, Nietzsche insists that we accord our lives with the truth about being, by willing the will to power.⁵⁰ But in so doing so the abyss of eternally disappearing foundations becomes a new foundation: to live the will to power is to willfully turn the disappearance of foundations into the determinative ground of one's being by endlessly actualizing becoming as creative destruction. Thereby we attain "the supreme will to power," which is to "impose upon becoming the character of being," since the activity of creative destruction brings nothingness into constant presence. Despite Nietzsche's desire to avoid nihilism, this leads directly to it since this activity cannot have any goal, purpose, or meaning outside of itself.⁵¹ Nothing may be acknowledged as a determinate, stabile frame of reference for the postulation of the value distinctions Nietzsche aimed to create. Unlike Hegelian freedom, there is neither need nor space for the recognition of a genuine other to absolute, self-referential willing. The only guide—foundation—for this willing is the will to power as the unending creating and voiding of any permanence.⁵² Nihilism emerges not only because there can be no goal, meaning, purpose, frame of reference, or guiding ground outside of the will to power, but also because willing the will to power demands the destructive rejection of any such guidelines. "There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power."⁵³ Unlike Hegel, who thought being as substance *and* subject, Nietzsche thinks being just as subject, as the negativity of a consciousness whose being is defined by reducing everything to being for self; his perspectivism is simply the absolutizing of being for self. Neither any individual nor cultural past has any meaning save as grist for endless reinterpretation and deconstruction. The irony is that Nietzsche provides no coherent resources to establish that his noble supermen are superior to the herd, the mindless consumers of bourgeois society, caught up in perpetually attempting to redefine themselves through an insatiable pursuit of endless stimulation and novelty.⁵⁴ Contrast Hegel's practical conception of true being as the activity of freedom. It achieves what Nietzsche sought but failed to provide: ungrounded willing, where willing activity is determined by nothing but the will and what it can establish. As Hegel shows, this mode of willing consists in willing that is strictly self-determining because both its form and content—how and what it wills—arise solely out of

the willing of freedom, so that freedom alone is determinative. While Nietzsche's attempt at ungrounded willing leads to nihilistic solipsism, Hegel shows that the will wills itself as free only through the mutual recognitive act of wills together willing property, and various other relationships, structures, and institutions.⁵⁵ These institutions only are institutions of freedom as long as they are freely willed and sustained by freely willed participation, but they are as such nonetheless determinate, enduring, real entities, opening a space for freedom rather than involving the self-referential closure of a will to power where the only meaning lies in the perpetual postulation and negation of meaning, the foundationless foundation endorsed by so many of Nietzsche's postmodernist followers, gripped by an unshakeable fear of the determinate.⁵⁶

Notes

1. Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 191, 35.
2. Barry Cooper, *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 347, 67, 350.
3. Stanley Rosen, *G. W. F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 16, 130.
4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 171.
5. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. H. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 11.
6. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Silbree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 103.
7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1974) III, 551–52; *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, 170–71.
8. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, 208; *The Philosophy of History*, 456.
9. Raymond Plant, "Is There A Future in the Philosophy of History?" in *Hegel's Philosophy of Action*, ed. L. S. Stepelevich and D. Lamb, 93–102 (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 94, 95.
10. Daniel Berthold-Bond, "Hegel's Eschatological Vision: Does History Have a Future?" *History and Theory* 27, no. 1 (February 1988): 16.
11. Richard D. Winfield, "The Theory and Practice of the History of Freedom: The Right of History in Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Overcoming Foundations*, 271–93 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Stephen Houlgate, "World History as Progress of Consciousness: An Interpretation of

Hegel's Philosophy of History," *The Owl of Minerva* 22, no.1 (Fall 1990): 69–80; Will Dudley, "Freedom in and Through Hegel's Philosophy," *Canadian Philosophical Review* 39, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 683–704. In "Circulation and Constitution at the End of History," David Kolb describes Hegel's end as "*an unblocking of circulation*. Barriers would have been removed that restricted the movement of something whose flow creates society. . . . Hegel's 'end of history' can be described as the unbinding of a circulation. In it, the movement of mutual recognition and/as Spirit's self-comprehension finally overcomes otherness and completes the circle of Spirit's becoming." In *Endings: Questions of Memory in Hegel and Heidegger*, ed. Rebecca Comay and John McCumber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 59. Unlike me, Kolb is skeptical about Hegel's success at marrying the unblocking with a philosophical completion. While I concur in seeing Hegel's end as an unblocking, I will argue that it does not involve overcoming otherness in a reductive sense.

12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. F. G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 7.

13. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, I, 95. See also 380.

14. Speaking of modern philosophy, Hegel wrote, "The principle is hereby gained, but only the principle of freedom of spirit; and the greatness of our time rests in the fact that freedom . . . is recognized. . . . This however is merely abstract, for the next step is that the principle of freedom is again purified and comes to its true objectivity." *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* III, 423.

15. See especially the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and to the first edition of the *Science of Logic*.

16. "Besides it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest but engaged in moving forward. . . . The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world. But this new world is no more a complete actuality than is a new-born child" *Phenomenology*, 6–7.

17. "The most perfect method of knowledge proceeds in the pure form of thought: and here the attitude of man is one of entire freedom." "In logic a thought is understood to include nothing else but what depends on thinking and what thinking has brought into existence." G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), §24, Zusatz, 41–42, 39.

18. Insofar as both philosophy and modernity instantiate self-determination, philosophy can illuminate how modernity constitutes its normativity out of itself.

19. As I will discuss below, in the will to power Nietzsche explores the former option of taking the structure of asserting or postulating as foundational.

20. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), §27.

21. "World History as the Progress of Consciousness," 77. I would add that those given external forces may include established modes of understanding about what makes us what we are, modes of understanding to which we have become historically conditioned and which we accept as given and authoritative.

22. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, I, 254.

23. "[T]he living Substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself," "the spontaneous becoming of itself." *Phenomenology*, 10, 11. Importantly, for Hegel this means that even the nature of the subject cannot be taken as a given. Hence his many cautionary remarks in the logic about the error of assuming we already know and may begin with a determinate model of subjectivity.

24. In the *Phenomenology* the framework of heteronomous determination is captured in terms of consciousness' oppositional relation to being as an object or *Gegenstand*: Consciousness captures the essence of heteronomy as other-determining in that consciousness always understands being minimally and irreducibly as what is always found already formed in its field of awareness as the determining ground of truth.

25. *Phenomenology*, 49.

26. It cannot omit what it contributes, as that is part of what is present, but it cannot fully thematize or incorporate it either. First, that requires another contributory act. Second, such incorporation would deviate from the assumption that being is what is found fully present as already given. Even when consciousness does thematize its own activity, it never makes it fully present; and when it is finally fully present in absolute knowing, consciousness disappears as a determinate presencing framework.

27. Parmenides, Fragments # 342, 346, pp. 266–67, 271 in G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957.) "For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. Since both are *for* the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for the same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not." *Phenomenology*, 54.

28. Parmenides, Fragments # 347 and 348, pp. 273, 275.

29. *Phenomenology*, 54.

30. "Hence it comes to pass for consciousness that that what it previously took to be the *in-itself* is not an *in-itself*, or that it was only an *in-itself for consciousness*. . . We see that consciousness now has two objects: one is the first *in-itself*, the second is the *being-for-consciousness of this in-itself*. The latter appears at first sight to be merely the reflection of consciousness into itself, i.e., what consciousness has in mind is not an object, but only its knowledge of that first object. But . . . that first object, in being known, is altered for consciousness; it ceases to be the *in-itself*, and becomes something that is the *in-itself* only *for* consciousness. And this then is the True. . . . The new object contains the nothingness of the first." *Phenomenology*, 54.

31. *Phenomenology*, 12.

32. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, 48.

33. But importantly not as, or in terms of, some already given, determinate, subjectivity. Were that the case the system of free self-determining thought would be dependent upon and illicitly determined by an ungrounded determinacy. Hegel's point is that genuine free thought cannot begin with an already determinate structure at all.

34. "But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative . . . on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being." *Phenomenology*, 19.

35. As Hegel indicates however, this being should not be confused with the merely existent.

36. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 581–82.

37. See Will Dudley, "Hegel on the Irrationality of the Rational," *The Owl of Minerva* 35, no. 1, 2 (2003–04): 25–48.

38. Important for Hegel is that the very recognition of the genuine other involves thinking it as other; recognition does not entail the postulation of the transcendent unintelligibility of the other, since for Hegel such unintelligibility means we cannot finally distinguish the other as a genuine other. Paradoxically, or dialectically, the infinity and eternality of systematic truth are marked by its capacity to reach self-sufficiency and completeness by determining and recognizing its own *limits*, and this always must involve a full acceptance of the otherness of the other.

39. "Hegel also recognizes and accepts the fact that any worldly manifestation or actualization of rational content must necessarily partake of contingent particularity, and hence irrational positivity." Dudley, "Hegel on the Irrationality of the Rational," 37.

40. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), §211.

41. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), §617.

42. For example, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §57.

43. See "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life," in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

44. *The Gay Science*, §344, cf. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1989), III, §§ 23, 24.

45. "A world in a state of becoming could not, in a strict sense, be 'comprehended' or 'known' " *The Will to Power*, §520. See also §§552, 12.

46. "The world with which we are concerned is false, i.e., is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations; it is 'in flux,' as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth: for—there is no 'truth.'" *The Will to Power*, §616.

47. *The Gay Science*, §109.

48. " 'Truth' is therefore not something there, that must be found or discovered—but something that must be created and gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end—introducing truth, as a *processus in infinitum*, an active determining—not a becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the 'will to power.' " *The Will to Power*, §552. So unlike Hegel's becoming, Nietzsche's is weighted toward nothingness. This can be seen in Nietzsche's repeated assurance that becoming is devoid of order, structure, lawfulness, purpose, goal, and meaning.

49. The very attempt to distinguish one from another, to create a coherent framework of past, present, and future, would require lapsing to a foundational postulation of some enduring being.

50. "[T]he basic fact of the human will, its *horror vacui*: it needs a goal—and it will rather will *nothingness* than not *will*." *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, §1, 97.

51. "[N]ow one realizes that becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves nothing . . . that becoming has no goal and that underneath becoming there is no grand unity." *The Will to Power*, §12, see §§25, 55.

52. "It [nihilism] places the value of things precisely in the lack of any reality corresponding to these values and in their being merely a symptom of strength on the part of the value-positer." "That it is the measure of strength to what extent we can admit to ourselves, without perishing, the merely *apparent* character, the necessity of lies. To this extent nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a *divine way of thinking*." *The Will to Power*, §§ 13. 15.

53. *The Will to Power*, §55.

54. "Capitalism . . . not only never is but never can be stationary. . . . [It] incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism. It is what capitalism consists in." Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1975), 82. "The 'eternal now' of modern urban existence, for which everything that happened more than ten minutes ago is ancient history, has eroded that precious medium of experience, tradition." Terry Eagleton, *London Review of Books*, June 23, 2005, 23.

55. See R. D. Winfield, "Hegel's Challenge to the Modern Economy," in *Hegel On Economics and Freedom*, ed. William Maker, 29–63 (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987) and R. D. Winfield, *Reason and Justice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 160ff.

56. See Richard Rorty, "Self-creation and affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger," chapter 5 in Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). "For some postmodern thinkers, we are clay in our own hands, free to mould our bodies and psyches into whatever shapes we find most appealing. Behind a belief in the endless plasticity of the world lies a rather less congenial faith in an iron will which stamps its imprint on these shapes. Self-authorship is the bourgeois fantasy par excellence; and even though the bourgeoisie as Freud knew it has almost vanished from Europe, this middle class myth is alive and well in the rugged individualism of the United States. The American Dream acknowledges no limits. When the ancient Greeks heard talk of such infinite striving, they looked fearfully to the sky." Terry Eagleton, *London Review of Books*, Jan. 24, 2008, 20.

Hegel, Utopia, and the Philosophy of History

Mario Wenning

An engagement with utopian forms of consciousness is in the background of Hegel's thinking. It influences his reception of the French Revolution, his critique of the revolution's continuation in German Romanticism, as well as his project of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) with the present. Hegel specifically criticizes forms of utopian consciousness in the *Philosophy of Right* and throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹ Yet, there is a marked ambivalence in Hegel's relationship to utopian reason. By "utopian reason" I mean reason's ability to transcend anything merely given with an eye to its perfectibility. His relationship is ambivalent because it marks both an appropriation and a critique. It is these conflicting dimensions I hope to disentangle. Hegel criticizes forms of utopian longing as attempts to escape reality, while at the same time incorporating what can be called a "utopian impulse." This impulse is revealed in his conception of spirit as essentially dynamic. By incorporating anti-utopian insights into a philosophy that clearly borrows from the utopian tradition, Hegel sets up a yardstick for any sophisticated self-reflective post-Hegelian form of utopian thinking and normative theory more generally.

On the one hand, Hegel is dismissive of utopian consciousness and unmasks it as rooted in an insatiable desire for a beyond, which, as a form of infinite approximation to a distant postulate, can never reach any form of satisfaction in the present. Utopian consciousness is an expression of the all too solitary law of the heart, a vacuous longing, which tries to escape the very reality it nevertheless remains a part of, and thereby espousing an "atheism of the ethical world." If followed through, it leads

to fanatic forms of consciousness and totalitarian practices, revealed by the fury of destruction following the French Revolution. The critique of the present from the vantage point of utopian projections in the form of abstract normative ideals or inexpressible feelings has not yet surpassed the stage of *Moralität* and inwardness to that of modern *Sittlichkeit*. Such a critique longs for a paradisiacal state outside history. As an unbounded subjective imagination it continues to dream the dream of a constantly deferred fresh beginning. Because this beginning never truly begins, it remains an unhappy consciousness, which is incapable of overcoming the forms of alienation (*Entzweiung*) that characterize modern life and philosophy, be it in the form of mind versus body (Descartes), transcendental versus empirical self (Kant), citizen versus private person (Marx), and so on.² Utopian thought is divided between a—usually miserable—here and a superior beyond. Being thus divided it fails to acknowledge the substantive reality of which it nevertheless remains a part. It misunderstands philosophy's role by conceiving of it as having access to a normative realm that has no manifestation in reality. The capriciousness of the utopian eagle at daybreak is thus famously dismissed by Hegel in favor of the wisdom of the owl at dusk.

However, there is also a different side to Hegel. He cannot be understood, I want to argue, without acknowledging a utopian impulse that is at work in his thinking. If we take his authorship to be authentic, already in the “Oldest Program for a System of German Idealism” he calls for the inauguration of a “sensuous religion” of the imagination, a “mythology of *reason*,” for the sake of “exposing the whole miserable human business of state, constitution, government and legislation.” This, the programmatic fragment concludes, “will be the last, greatest task of humanity.”³ His engagement with the watershed event of the French Revolution and the demand for a new unity and the emancipation to true, as opposed to merely abstract, forms of freedom are representative of a normative commitment to a not yet (at least not yet fully) realized utopian potential, a form of transcendence that is not of a different world, but reveals itself immanently in this one. Hegel attempts to reveal normative potentials for reconciling the opposing forces of the right of subjectivity and objective spirit: only when our demand for justification and the normativity, which is sedimented in the content of specifically modern sociohistorical institutions and practices, can be reconciled can modernity survive. Showing in what sense Hegel is a utopian thinker (and in what sense he is not) brings to light an aspect of his thought, which to my knowledge has not been adequately emphasized.⁴ The utopian dimension of Hegel's thought that will emerge consists in a commitment to what I call a *genealogy of rational tendencies* aiming at

reconciliation. Utopia is thus not thought of in terms of some ahistorical thought example as in Thomas More's classic or Plato's *Republic*. Neither is it a rational procedure to determine normative contents as in Habermas's ideal speech situation, or Rawls's original position. It is also not to be confused with the stipulation of a natural state of bliss as in Rousseau or as an imagined future indicative of most modern utopian discourse (e.g., Marx's communist society, Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, etc.). Rather, a utopian impulse is at work in Hegel's conception of the specific normativity of modernity, *Neuzeit*, which he characterizes as "a time of birth and transition to a new era," in which "Spirit has broken with the previous world of its existence and imagination, and is about to submerge it into the past. It is working on its own transformation."⁵

The Normative Problem Raised by the French Revolution

Hegel's engagement with utopian reason needs to be understood as emerging out of his reception of the French Revolution. This event initially seemed to be the realization of utopia. By way of trying to institute universal and equal rights it promised the realization of the essential ideals and aspirations of Enlightenment reason. In principle everybody from now on could appeal to be recognized and treated as a free and equal person with a sense of human dignity. What the course of the revolutionary events also revealed was the failure of realizing these universal aspirations through a radical overthrow. For the contemporaries it revealed the inherent impossibility of every revolution to come. The postrevolutionary time-consciousness radically changed through the revolutionary experience in that the belief in inevitable progress, which had replaced the medieval belief in a recurring history, was again shaken in its foundation. The revolution devoured its children (strikingly depicted in Büchner's *Danton's Death*) and reverted to the very acts of violence it had before criticized. To alter the metaphor, the institution of universal norms had devoured the particular content of what they were initially designed for: the claims, passions, and interests of particular individuals. The revolution did thus not only result in political despair but posed a troubling normative problem. On the one hand it was necessary, but on the other hand it showed itself to be impossible. Joachim Ritter's now classic article "Hegel and the French Revolution"⁶ emphasizes this Janus-faced character and its consequences for Hegel's thinking. Ritter shows that despite Hegel's criticism of its excesses he remained a defender of the revolution and is said to have celebrated the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille every year. The revolution brought the history

of the reign of particular interests to an end and started a new history in the name of universal human rights and freedom. Yet, Hegel observed that by way of denying the historical substance (which it relied on at least by contrasting itself to it as a prehistory to be ended), the revolution lacked the normative resources to be recognized and recognize itself as authoritative. Continuity could not be born out of an event, which understood itself to be utterly discontinuous. Hegel thought the only way possible to overcome this dilemma would be by way of legitimating the historical rupture that the revolution embodied by providing it with a prehistory. Doing so he hoped to reconcile the revolutionary aspirations with the historical substance necessary to legitimize and stabilize the claims set up by the revolution to prevent its relapse to forms of prerevolutionary absolutism, arbitrariness, and violence. The normative problem of instituting universal rights thus necessitates a turn to the philosophy of history.

I will not address Hegel's genealogical *Bildungsroman* of the emergence of universal norms, in particular freedom, from its "Oriental" childhood through its Greek and Roman youth, continuing in its Christian maturity and finally culminating in the French Revolution. Instead, the focus is on the methodological idea of a historical genealogy and its guiding normative ideal of reconciling the revolutionary prehistory with its revolutionary present to secure for the realization of its potential.⁷

The philosophical historiography to fulfil this task is based on the "simple thought of reason" (*einfacher Gedanke der Vernunft*) according to which "reason guides the world and hence that world history has as well proceeded reasonably."⁸ It is the thought of reason in the double sense of being a thought *of* reason and also a thought reflecting *on* reason as it is manifested in history. The presupposition of reason is the constitutive principle of investigating world history. Although philosophical historiography presupposes the assumption or thought of the existence of reason without truly justifying its validity, the efficacy and thus "correctness" (*Richtigkeit*) of this assumption is redeemed by way of the performative success of such a form of historiography: "Who looks at the world with reason is in turn also looked at with reason, both are reciprocal determinations,"⁹ Hegel writes.

The speculative idea that reason guides history sounds at least awkward, if not downright apologetic. To make it intelligible it is necessary to first dismiss the misunderstanding according to which reason is some form of author of history in the sense of actually ruling history according to transhistorical intentions. To assume that there is reason in history is not an ontological statement about the fabric of history, nor does it presuppose a magnificent mind which operates "behind the

backs” of historical events. Drawing on Anaxagoras, who is accredited to first have conceived of the necessity to assume reason in history, Hegel distinguishes the guiding idea of reason from the assumption that a “self-conscious reason” or a “spirit as such” governs the world. Reason, rather than mere contingency, becomes manifest in the world through the unfolding of historical or natural events without the necessity of a conscious subject steering and understanding this development, just as the solar movements are rule-governed without the necessity of self-conscious stars and planets.

Every historical investigation “brings its categories”¹⁰ to the table. In the *Third Critique* Kant shows that we necessarily apply regulative ideals to our investigation of nature in order to understand organic life as more than dead matter adhering to the laws of mechanical causation. The necessity to adopt a regulative idea, Hegel argues, extends to the philosophical investigation of history as well. To investigate history cannot mean to passively record information concerning past events. The goal is rather to concretely trace the manifestation of reason in the world.¹¹

The presupposition of reason in history is initially a heuristic assumption. Contrary to an abstract faith in religious providence (*Vorsehung*), which remains empty because it does not concretely uncover reason in apparent disorder or the simplistic equation of reason and history, critical philosophical historiography reinterprets the religious belief concerning the revelation of divinity in concrete ways. It steers its path between the Scylla of a superficial faith in divine providence governing the course of the world and the Charybdis of taking reason to be merely otherworldly. The expressed goal is to present a “concrete theodicy” in order to “reconcile thinking spirit with evil.”¹² History is designated as the most important and most difficult domain to achieve this project. Most important because it is the essential part of the overall attempt of providing the resources for reconciling the prerevolutionary past with the revolutionary present, our demands for justification with the historically situated (and thus historically justifiable) institutions of *Sittlichkeit*. It is the most difficult task, because history appears to be anything but reasonable or open to reconciliation. “This reconciliation,” Hegel contends, “can only be achieved through an understanding of the affirmative in which the negative vanishes to the level of something subordinated and overcome.”¹³

Contrary to a common legend of Hegel, however, he does not dismiss or even ignore the horrors of history. Reconciliation is a critical task in that it becomes effective only through a concrete understanding of the unfolding of reason in rational tendencies. Measured against these tendencies, certain negative characteristics, injustices, dissatisfactions, and

sufferings first appear as unnecessary and thus objectionable. In order to achieve such a critical understanding, we first have to understand what is meant by “reason.” In order to understand what reason in history is, Hegel claims, we necessarily have to answer the question of what is the “absolute aim of the world” (*der Endzweck der Welt*). This step is necessary in order to be able to contrast and place different historical events and tendencies into a common history, to distinguish rational from irrational tendencies rather than treating everything as a matter of mere contingency. In contemporary terms, we need to reveal the normative basis of such a critical philosophy of history. This normative basis has to be shown to be somehow manifest rather than a mere imposition to its object. Only then does it become clear that it is not just the case that every “ought” must be translatable into a “can” but, more importantly, that every “ought” is to a certain extent already existing in tendencies and is thus logically connected to an “is,” which then translates into further “oughts.” The “final end” is thus not realized, *verwirklicht*, at the end of a historical development. It is more appropriate to translate *Verwirklichung* (sometimes Hegel also uses the term *Vollführung*) as “becoming effective” rather than “realization” and translate *Endzweck* as “absolute aim” rather than “final end” to emphasize the dynamic character implied by Hegel’s idiosyncratic reinterpretation of the idea of providence. The absolute aim is not a static entity outside or at the end of history, but the becoming-effective of freedom in history. Contrary to signalling a quasi-eschatological end to history as the utopian tradition has done, Hegel interprets the idea of providence as the inner-worldly becoming effective and unfolding of stages of the “development in the consciousness of freedom,” the ability to say yes and no to whatever is given based on self-reflective reasoning and evaluation.

While the prerevolutionary thinkers Lessing and Kant believed that the education of humankind or the progress to eternal peace would take thousands, if not indefinitely many years, the postrevolutionary Hegel believed that there has been sufficient normative achievement. Then the task is to trace the emergence of freedom and its manifestation in different constitutions, philosophical systems, and practices and use these normative achievements as yardsticks. These yardsticks are not derived from abstract claims but from historically specific and effective tendencies from which it is no longer possible or at least not desirable to retreat.¹⁴ That the *Endzweck* is not a final but an absolute aim that guides the philosophical investigation of history is supported by the claim that in some sense it was present all along, if only latently. However, only when the manifestation or actualization of reason’s becoming self-conscious by way of historical actors increasingly understanding themselves as free

is “the absolute aim” manifesting itself. In this sense “world history is progress in the consciousness of freedom.”¹⁵

The secularization of the idea of providence by Hegel also means that it is no longer justified for serious scientific investigation (*Wissenschaft*) to make predictions or even educated guesses about the future. Although the strong normative content of strong evaluative terms such as “freedom,” “equality,” “right,” or “the idea of the state” bear a utopian excess in that they never find full realization in any specific historical tokens, this content is never detached from forms of historical manifestation and potentials of realization. Those few passages where Hegel oversteps the limits he erects for himself by making predictions, which anticipated among other things the rise of Russia and the conflict between North and South America, usually are qualified by statements that really (*eigentlich*) prediction is not the business of the serious philosophical scientist who has to stay agnostic with regard to potential future developments of spirit. The only access to the normative potential the future holds is through an investigation of progressive tendencies we find in history and the present.

This agnosticism with regard to the future does not get acknowledged when Hegel’s concept of the necessary development of reason is criticized as an overflow of *panlogism*. All that the term *necessary* means is that it is possible to trace the development of stages of cultural development *post factum*. It is premised on the assumption that a “universal” narrative, which situates the present in a historical development, can be constructed retrospectively. Just as the first measure of a symphony does not allow the prediction of what is to follow, we speak with good reasons about a “necessary” progression of chords and a necessary development of motifs when analyzing music. We might form expectations with regard to the continuing “progression” of the melody, but we also know from (at least good) music that its “success” consists precisely in often “disappointing” set expectations. Effective experiences of music open ourselves up to new possibilities without putting us into a position of being able to predict in advance how they will play out. Similarly, normative theory understood as a critical genealogy of rational tendencies traces the emergence of norms and values such as freedom, justice, and solidarity in their different historical shapes and treats them at the same time not as fully given or realized, but as essentially incomplete.

Let us return to the question of the way in which Hegel connects the idea of a philosophical historiography with his critique of utopian thinking. The infamous proposition from the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, “What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational”¹⁶ (*Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig*),

perhaps best expresses Hegel's ambiguous stand with regard to utopia. It comes with no surprise that Hegel's immediate successors have regarded the first part of the proposition as expressing the need of reason to be manifest, of reason to become actual, as much as the second part sounds apologetic in assigning to actuality the status of exhibiting reason.

During the last decades the account of Hegel as the reactionary Prussian state philosopher, an account usually epitomized by the *Doppelsatz*, has been superseded by a more nuanced interpretation, which shows that Hegel does not easily fit into either the left nor the right Hegelian camps.¹⁷ In Hegel's *Logic* it becomes clear that *Wirklichkeit*, actuality, is a later and far advanced stage of reality, which is the culmination of immediate being, appearance (*Erscheinung*), and existence. Actuality is defined as the unity of essence and existence and is contrasted to mere existence. For normative theory this means that norms are not to be conceived of merely in terms of either their essence, what they mean and how they can be justified, nor are they merely to be reduced to their coming-into-being, their historical emergence and present facticity. Rather, Hegel engages in a *dialectics of genesis and validity*, a form of immanent critique that measures normative claims against their historical emergence and those practices they are supposed to account for. Because these claims often do not "fit" what they are about when, let's say, a rhetoric of freedom is used to justify the waging of war, historical manifestations and their normative frameworks are shown to be in need of change to bridge the gap. Reconciliation is another name for an insight that the gap between claims and what they claim to be about needs to be overcome historically.

These rational tendencies are the seeds of actuality as the unity of essence and existence, which needs to become effective in concrete historical ways.¹⁸ Of course these tendencies do not guarantee their realization. They are historical chances which can be forgotten and rediscovered. They are real possibilities that can increase or decrease depending on a variety of historical conditions and motivations of historical actors.

The Critique of Romantic Utopianism

We have seen that Hegel's account of the emergence of reason in the form of rational tendencies is his answer to the problem of instituting absolute norms in light of the discontinuity of authority brought about by the revolution. This account is further elaborated in Hegel's criticism of the utopian ideas of Romanticism, which he sees as the continuation of the negative aspects of the French Revolution in Germany. Hegel

diagnoses that the Romantics are not committed enough (or at least not in the correct way) to their normative ideals. They do not link them to a critical understanding of the present and the past. Thus, they deprive themselves from making these ideals historically effective. Apart from some of his own early ideas, which drew on Schiller's and Hölderlin's account of love and aesthetic unification, Hegel's critique is addressed at Friedrich Schlegel's conception of irony and utopian novels such as Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.¹⁹ In Novalis's *Bildungsroman*, contrary to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, the protagonist strives for the fantastic and structurally unreachable place of his dreams. Heinrich's striving for the blue flower, the symbol of a golden age, logically outrules the possibility of reconciliation through historical learning processes in favour of a universal and ahistorical utopia that can only be conceived of as an apocalyptic futural escape from history and thus a place outside immanent historical horizons. The problem of such utopian depictions is not so much their claims about the future or desirable states, but that they do not have anything meaningful to contribute to the understanding of the present and its past apart from the fact that it is miserable when measured against the promise exerted by the "blue flower."

More sophisticated normative theory with a utopian intent should not just settle with an impotent ought, but needs to point out rational tendencies within the present reality and its history.²⁰ Hegel advocates an ought, which like Kant's good will, "shines like a jewel." Contrary to concretely and critically questioning reality by tracing normative tendencies, the Romantics dreamed of a beyond that was a *mere* possibility (*ein nur Mögliches*). On the Romantic account, possibility and actuality are conceived as mere opposites with no living connection. Any chance of change is denigrated to the status of an infinitely postponed ideal, a postulate of reason, which can never be even remotely realized through historical agents and actions. A goal that cannot be realized, however, is no goal worth aspiring to at all. One easily succumbs to self-pity in light of one's distance to allegedly higher purposes. A pondering on possibilities commits one to a form of inwardness of being locked in one's subjective will.

If abstract ratiocination treats possibility as detached and logically prior to actuality, Hegel states in the *Encyclopedia Logic*,²¹ everything becomes possible: "that tonight the moon will fall on the earth . . . [or] that the Turkish Kaiser will become pope, because it is a human being who can convert to Christianity and become a catholic Priest."²² In other words, all standards to measure the feasibility of one's normative aspirations are lost when one engages in pondering about possibility detached from concrete, even if only rudimentary manifestations of this

possibility. Furthermore, a pondering on possibility serves as an excuse not to become practical in engaging with the present: because this utopian form of consciousness “regards the present as vain and looks beyond it in a spirit of superior knowledge, it finds itself in a vain position; and since it has actuality only in the present, it is itself mere vanity.”²³ To be utopian in the bad sense, to believe in possibility as an independent reality detached from its historical realizability and partial realization in tendencies, serves as an escape from sociopolitical engagement and the history of which one nevertheless remains a part. Hegel’s criticism of the Romantic conception of normativity can thus be summarized as follows: a certain discourse about ideals and norms, one that treats them as detached and otherworldly because there are no corresponding social practices whatsoever, is pointless or even dangerous.²⁴

It is important to stress that what this critique is getting at is not just future-oriented imagination but equally a naïve restoration. The poetic version of restorative tendencies can be found in the Romantics’ idealization of the Middle Ages. Both, abstract imagination about the future and a naïve hope for a restoration of an allegedly golden past, represent hypocritical attempts to escape the present and its history by either trying to engage in a questionable construction of the past or move toward a paradise *totally* different from the here and now. Hegel diagnoses that their inverted consciousness consists in a negation of the ground they are standing on. In this sense the Romantics are *u-topos* or no-where. In contrast, the task of a critical philosophical science consists in revealing the normativity that has been historically achieved; it tries to keep the present from regressing below or ignoring this achievement either because of capricious longing or blind apologetics.

The practice of “contingent imagination” serves edification where there is a need for critical comprehension (*Begreifen*) in the original sense of *krinein* as a complex, concrete, and differentiated investigation of the subject matter. If the utopian spirit of the imagination unleashes itself to political action, it results in the blind fury of destruction. Escapism and political radicalism thus do not exclude each other but are two sides of the same precarious loss of actuality (*Wirklichkeitsverlust*) through positing normativity as something detached from actuality and measure a society by standards that are foreign, perhaps even incommensurable to its normative framework.

Despite his emphasis on actuality Hegel does not dismiss the category of possibility altogether. Neither does he reduce it to actuality. Rather he introduces a different, richer conception of possibility than that adopted by bad utopian consciousness. Contrary to mere possibility, it is now thought of as existent (*seined*) and as such a condition for progress.

Only this conception can lead to change (*Wechsel*) and improvement. He writes: "Indeed, immediate actuality bears the seed of something totally different in itself. This different is initially only something possible whose form is then changed and translated into actuality."²⁵ The role of the philosopher as investigating the manifestation of reason in his time is thus to trace the mediations in what initially appears to be immediate. Critical philosophy pursues rational tendencies, which qua their connection to actuality as real tendencies, point beyond themselves to, what Hegel calls in one of his more utopian moments, a "totally different" state of affairs. These tendencies are the missing link that was not available to the radical revolutionaries or the Romantics. Rational tendencies rather than given or postulated norms are the mediating link between a past and a sustainable future. Focusing on these tendencies does precisely not entail to neglect what is but allows to understand it as an appearance (*Schein*) pointing beyond itself. By way of measuring norms against their sustaining practices, immediacy is unmasked as an illusion. The task of philosophy is to be a midwife, which helps to bring existing rational tendencies to light rather than "setting up a world beyond which exists God knows where."²⁶

This conception of critical comprehension of the present has direct consequences for what we may hope to achieve. Hegel does not deny that his philosophical historiography of the self-cultivation of reason in the form of rational tendencies faces enormous challenges. Not only does it seem that the driving force of historical events consists in particular and capricious interests and uneducated passions rather than the increasing actualization of universal freedom. History itself is characterized as the "slaughter bench [*Schlachtbank*] on which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states and the virtue of individuals has been sacrificed." The result of this insight is "the augmentation to the deepest sadness without consolation, which is not balanced by any reconciling conclusion."²⁷

However, even this senseless history of catastrophes, Hegel argues, *necessarily* raises the question of a hidden, subterranean meaning. Since the satisfaction of individuals is an "infinite right" the justification cannot just be one that denigrates individuals to the status of inessential accidents of history or the state as Hegel does in the *Philosophy of Right* against his better judgment,²⁸ the mere instruments of a larger development, the puppets of the slaughterhouse of world history. Periods of substantive happiness (*Glück*) on a larger social scale are said to be "empty pages." Hegel's concept of reconciliation thus needs to be distinguished from absolute reconciliation or the desire for absolute happiness as cherished by the romantics or absolute justice desired by the Jacobins.

The objection to the Romantic continuation of the revolutionary radicalism in thought reflects an ethics calling for modest demands and expectations, piecemeal reforms rather than absolute revolutions.²⁹ Coming to terms with the “seriousness of life” bears the potential of a deeper mildness. Not even in his personal life did Hegel equate the possibility of reconciliation with happiness. In a letter from 1811 to his sister Hegel acknowledges to have witnessed the realization of all his hopes in marrying Marie von Tucher but adds the important proviso “to the extent that happiness is part of my destiny (*Bestimmung*).” When Marie was infuriated about the qualified tone of his statement, he responded: “I do not mean that this should have hurt you!—I remind you, dear Marie, that your deeper sense also has taught you that every affection of happiness is also attached to a feeling of melancholy.”³⁰ Happiness is a dialectical moment that cannot exist without its other.

Outlook

Let me sum up. Drawing on Hegel’s engagement with utopian reason, we have developed the following systematic points. First, the normative problem raised by the rupture of the Revolution, namely, the problem of instituting universal norms in history, necessitated a genealogy of normative tendencies. Only by way of providing the revolution with a prehistory does it become viable. The systematic consequences are, secondly, that a radical utopian rhetoric, as engaged in by the Romantics, falsely conceives of norms as mere possibilities rather than actual historical chances. Third, rather than positing such norms as mere possibilities, the commitment to reconciliation thus becomes the background condition of a critical philosophy of history. We have finally seen that reconciliation, just as the absolute end of the world, is not to be conceived of as a final state, but rather as a background condition of our critical engagement with the past and the present.

Let me conclude with two critical observations, one concerning the proposed conception of reconciliation and one concerning the role of the new in Hegel’s critical philosophy of history. Moments of happiness and the experience of reconciliation are necessary, it seems, in order to give meaning to one’s particular place in society and history. What Hegel has to teach is that in order to strive toward being “at home in the world” it is necessary to be at least minimally reconciled with the history one is part of. This means to be able to see it as *one’s* history and not to regard oneself as a subtenant of someone else’s home, a “stranger in the world” that searches for an imaginary home in romantic fantasies

rather than in the available institutional and normative frameworks. To achieve this act of taking responsibility it is not sufficient to provide a mere historical narrative from the vantage point of the development of reason or absolute spirit, as Hegel tends to do in his worked-out system. It needs to be a meaningful narrative that is also addressed to the perspectives and the concerns of historical individuals, not the least the victims of history.

Secondly, to be truly meaningful such a narrative has to be addressed to or at least speak to the first person perspective. It must be existentially binding and exert a convincing justificatory as well as motivational force. Hegel does not fully do justice to the problem of rationally establishing the new from this first person perspective. He does not tell us what is to be done in situations where rational tendencies have become almost extinct, where we cannot rely on the potential stored up in those tendencies or where, as Adorno and Foucault have taught us, rational tendencies themselves cannot be categorically separated from pathologies accompanying them. By way of adopting an Aristotelian conception of a potentiality that realizes what was already there latent in its beginning, Hegel conceives of the moment of individual spontaneity and inventiveness as one of the realization of pre-given actual potentials. Thus, the new is never the absolute new and the person at the moment of decision is stripped of the burden of responsibility for the future and becomes a carrier of a structurally independent logic of unfolding. In the last instance Hegel wants to have his cake and eat it too: he wants the revolution without radical revolutionaries, utopian reason without utopian projections.³¹ Hegel sets up a problem that is still with us: the problem of how it is possible to conceptualize the inherent tension between the demands of individual human autonomy (which calls for designing its own self and conception of the future ever anew) and transsubjective tendencies of history.³² While Hegel tells us a detailed story about the latter, he is less concerned with the first person perspective.

The very starting point of wanting to construct a universal history has become difficult to understand and appears to be doomed to failure. We are utterly convinced of the ultimate contingency of historical processes. And even if we were to grant credence to the conviction that one can make sense of a *Weltendzweck*, an absolute purpose of the world, a nonarbitrary normative framework, we would hardly be content with being mere tools for its becoming-effective. We would legitimately raise the question, "What is rational about this reason?" I am hesitant to believe that Hegel's "solution" to the problem is ultimately satisfactory. To assign to historical agents the double status of puppets on the stage of world history yet at the same time autonomous agents with the ability

to “know, believe, and will the universal” is difficult to put together. I argue elsewhere that a moral theory more in line with Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* is a better candidate in accounting for the irresolvable tension between the claims of particulars and the existence of historical tendencies.³³ Despite these concerns, it would be wrong to dismiss the idea of a critical philosophy of history and the corresponding genealogy of rational tendencies. Only an awareness of, and critical engagement with real potentials constitutes the determinate horizon of possibility necessary for responsible action and critique to take place.

Hegel has shown in his criticism of revolutionary consciousness and its continuation in romantic longing that the only way to pursue the task of the “becoming effective” of reconciliation consists in providing a genealogical critique that shows why certain normative conceptions speak to us, why others break down and become unliveable. It is our ability to critique and point to inconsistencies in particular shapes of consciousness and forms of life, which presupposes a weak form of reconciliation as a tracing of the normative potentials and achievements of modernity. This is premised on the proviso that regressions and historical amnesia have been the norm rather than an exception. “To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby to delight in the present,” Hegel famously writes in the preface to the *Rechtsphilosophie*, “is the reconciliation with actuality.”³⁴ This project is not to be confused with an affirmation of what is given. Holding on to the demand of reconciliation does not mean to ignore that this present, including its history and potential futures, is for the most part a cross bearing the marks of suffering and despair. What it does deny is that romantic utopianism, a utopianism that searches the rose outside the cross, could get us anywhere.

Notes

1. Cf. the chapters “*Die absolute Freiheit und der Schrecken*,” “*Das Gewissen. Die schöne Seele, das Böse und seine Verzeihung*,” and “*Das unglückliche Bewußtsein*.”

2. For an account of Hegel’s diagnosis of modernity cf. Michael N. Forster’s account of the eight dualisms Hegel identified, largely in following Schiller, as the major crises of modernity. *Hegel’s Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17–125.

3. In *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 186 ff.

4. The important exceptions proving the rule are Ernst Bloch, *Subjekt und Objekt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962); Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960); and Adrien Peperzak, *Le jeune Hegel et la vision*

morale du monde (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960). Contrary to these approaches I do not believe in a clear distinction between a young, more utopian Hegel (roughly up to the *Phenomenology*) and a middle-aged and old reactionary thinker (most notably the Hegel of the *Rechtsphilosophie*). The utopian impulse persists throughout his work but is increasingly refined by self-reflexivity and certain anti-utopian insights.

5. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 11.

6. Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982): "There is no other philosophy that is a philosophy of revolution to such a degree and so profoundly, in its innermost drive, as that of Hegel," 43. Cf. also Jürgen Habermas, "Hegels Kritik der Französischen Revolution," in *Theorie und Praxis* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt 1978), 128–47.

7. Surprisingly, there have not been many attempts to address reconciliation as Hegel's major sociopolitical concern: Erzsébet Rózsa, *Versöhnung und System. Zu Grundmotiven von Hegels praktischer Philosophie* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005); Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy. The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

8. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 20.

9. *Ibid.*, 23.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Concerning the influence of Kant's *Third Critique* on Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, cf. Ludwig Siep, "Das Recht als Ziel der Geschichte. Überlegungen im Anschluß an Kant und Hegel," in *Das Recht der Vernunft*, ed. Ch. Fricke (Stuttgart: Frommann Holzboog, 1995), 355–79.

12. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 28.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Cf. Lucian Hölscher, "Hegel und die Zukunft," in *Die Weltgeschichte—das Weltgericht?* ed. Rüdiger Bubner and Walter Mesch (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 323–31.

15. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 32.

16. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 30.

17. Cf. for example Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

18. Cf. Ernst Bloch, "Die Dialektik der Geschichte, worin jede Lösung eine neue Aufgabe setzt, jede positive Bestimmtheit ihre Negation enthält und dadurch den Motor zu einer neuen, positiveren Bestimmtheit,—dieser wahre Krieg in Hegels 'Frieden der Vernunft mit der Wirklichkeit' hat das Vernunftrecht aus der Abstraktion "Der Schwur auf den Styx. Der zweideutige Kosmos der Rechtsphilosophie," herausgenommen und schließlich in möglichen Einklang mit der Tendenzwirklichkeit bringen lassen." From in *Materialien zu Hegels Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. Manfred Riedel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), 439.

19. Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, trans. Palmer Hilty (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1964).

20. Cf. Joachim Ritter, "Auseinandersetzung mit der kantischen Ethik," in *Metaphysik und Politik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003); Odo Marquard, "Hegel und das Sollen," in *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 37–51.

21. G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

22. Ibid., 283.

23. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 20.

24. Joseph Raz, without mentioning Hegel, defends the same antiutopian claim in *The Practice of Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

25. "In der Tat enthält aber solche unmittelbare Wirklichkeit den Keim zu etwas ganz anderem in sich. Dieses Andere ist zunächst nur ein Mögliches, welche Form sich dann aber aufhebt und in Wirklichkeit übersetzt." G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, 287.

26. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 20.

27. Ibid., 35.

28. Cf. paragraph 145.

29. Cf. also Bernard Yack, "The Longing Tamed," in *The Longing for Total Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 185–223.

30. Cited in Dieter Thomä, *Vom Glück in der Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 24.

31. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Im Weltgeist als dem Revolutionär, der es doch nicht sein darf, fasst sich Hegels ambivalentes Verhältnis zur Französischen Revolution noch einmal zusammen: Hegel will die Revolutionierung der Wirklichkeit ohne Revolutionäre." From "Hegels Kritik der Französischen Revolution," 144.

32. Cf. Emil Angehrn, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, Grundkurs Philosophie vol. 15 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991). "Die Autonomiebehauptung des Menschen, der zur Selbstgestaltung seines Daseins aufgerufen ist, und die Behauptung einer strikten Gesetzmäßigkeit des historischen Verlaufs. Damit aber wird das Verhältnis von Geschichtsautomatismus und verändernder Praxis zum ungelösten Dauerproblem. Nicht zuletzt in der Unerledigtheit dieser Frage gründet die Selbstauflösung der Geschichtsphilosophie" (101).

33. Mario Wenning, *Critical Theory, Utopia, and the Philosophy of History*, manuscript.

34. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 22.

Hegel's Account of the Present

An Open-Ended History

Karin de Boer

Introduction

Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and the *Philosophy of Right* are among the texts that have met with the most vehement criticisms. Such criticisms are often based on erroneous interpretations of concepts such as reason, spirit, and world spirit, or on an erroneous identification of Hegel's conception of the modern state with the Prussian state during the Restoration Era.¹ There is, however, one kind of criticism that cannot be as easily dismissed as these. For it seems justified to question Hegel's belief in the capacity of spirit increasingly to actualize itself in the tortuous element of world history. Thus, he maintains in *Reason in History* that his philosophy of world history aims at the reconciliation of spirit with the negative aspects of existence. This reconciliation, he adds, "can only be achieved through the knowledge of the affirmative, in which the negative dissolves into something subordinate and conquered."² Given the history of the twentieth century, it is quite understandable that many contemporary philosophers—in the wake of Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche—have turned against Hegel's seemingly unbridled optimism.

On closer inspection, however, even this criticism lacks sufficient ground. As I will argue in this chapter, Hegel's account of modern civilizations is much less optimistic than his account of the past. His philosophy of world history is optimistic about the past because it highlights only those moments that testify to the actualization of rational

freedom. Hegel is equally optimistic with regard to the philosophical comprehension of this freedom, a comprehension preeminently achieved in speculative science itself. Yet he seems to acknowledge, albeit hesitantly, that his dialectical conception of world history might not suffice to comprehend the sociopolitical collisions evolving out of the modern determination of freedom. Thus, Hegel equally maintains in *Reason in History* that the freedom of spirit consists “in a constant negation of that which threatens to destroy freedom” (55/48). This latter passage leaves open whether or not spirit will actually succeed in reducing the negative to the necessary means of its self-actualization.

Hegel’s hesitation as to the capacity of modernity to resolve its immanent conflicts preeminently emerges in his account of the oppositions between poverty and wealth and between the state and its citizens. In this chapter I will focus on passages from the *Essay on Natural Law*, the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, and the *Philosophy of Right* that express this hesitation and, hence, complicate the prevailing view of Hegel’s philosophy of world history. Several commentators have noted that Hegel’s dialectics offers no solution to some of the problems to which modernity gave birth.³ Yet if contemporary philosophy still faces the task of grasping its own time in thought, as I think it does, then it cannot leave it at that. It should rather attempt, in my view, to turn Hegel’s hesitation into a philosophical principle of its own. Such a principle would allow contemporary philosophy to comprehend its own age as torn apart by tragic conflicts rather than by resolvable contradictions.⁴ Before turning to Hegel’s account of modernity I will briefly consider the basic principles that it presupposes.

Hegel’s Conception of World History

Hegel’s views on world history and the modern state have often been dismissed as uncritical defenses of a particular theological worldview or a particular political system. I hold that neither of these claims is justified. Although Hegel sometimes draws on religious images to clarify what he means by the concept, the idea, or reason, he does not assume that a divine power consciously governs the world. The subject of his philosophy of world history—spirit—is neither a substance nor a subject in any current sense of the terms. The concept of spirit rather refers, I would contend, to the efforts of thought to comprehend itself.⁵ As far as its occurrence in world history is concerned, the concept of spirit exclusively refers to the mode of thought that underlies the efforts of successive civilizations both to organize themselves in a rational way and to comprehend the

principle of this self-organization. It refers, in other words, to the effort of a particular civilization to become conscious of itself.⁶ On this view, Hegel's philosophy of world history is exclusively concerned with the efforts of successive civilizations to organize themselves in a rational way and to comprehend the principle of this self-organization. For Hegel, any such organization relies on a particular determination of the principle of freedom. Accordingly, the *Philosophy of Right* is exclusively concerned with the sociopolitical structures of the modern state that follow from this principle, that is, with the *idea* of the modern state.⁷ The principle of freedom, in its turn, is nothing but a particular way in which the absolute principle of self-determination, that is, the concept as such, occurs within the finite element of world history.

The more a civilization has succeeded in organizing itself in accordance with this principle, the more it has disentangled itself from the arbitrariness and chaos proper to nature (*The Philosophy of History*, 58–59/40–41). The principle of freedom develops its inherent determinations because civilizations at a certain point become aware—by means of individuals or groups—that the particular determination of freedom on which they relied is at odds with the principle of freedom as such. The insight into this contradiction can only occur, according to Hegel, when a civilization has exhausted the possibilities opened up by this particular determination of freedom. The insight into the one-sidedness of its determination of freedom necessarily yields a less one-sided determination of freedom.⁸ Just as particular concepts such as “being” or “substance” at a certain point turn out to prevent thought from achieving adequate knowledge of the world, particular determinations of the principle of freedom at a certain point turn out to prevent a civilization from adequately maintaining itself as an organic totality. At this stage, such a particular determination of freedom no longer enhances the well-being of the civilization but rather causes its downfall. The insight into the one-sidedness of this particular determination of freedom yields a less one-sided determination of freedom.⁹ This new determination emerges within the existing civilization, but as a germ that can only begin to develop once the existing determination of freedom has been abolished. As long as the absolute principle of freedom is determined in a one-sided manner, a civilization will at some point become aware that its actual determination of freedom falls short of this principle itself.

I would like to recall that Hegel never purports to construct the successive stages of world history by means of reason alone. His philosophy of world history is, on the one hand, exclusively concerned with world history insofar as it testifies to the actualization of freedom. Yet it must, on the other hand, always draw on empirical investigations

in order to lay bare the essential moments of this actualization.¹⁰ This focus allows Hegel completely to discard certain aspects of world history, such as the mere succession of events or the fate of individual citizens. It equally allows him to discard views on world history informed by morality, piety, or dread.¹¹ By relegating these aspects to the realm of mere contingency, only those aspects of world history that testify to the increasing actualization of freedom emerge as essential to world history as such.¹² This entails, for Hegel, that moments of crisis necessarily announce the birth of a less one-sided determination of freedom. However, since modern societies are based on the idea that human beings as such are free, they are supposed to have overcome, at least in principle, the limited conceptions of freedom inherent in premodern civilizations. Hegel seems to be less certain, therefore, whether the collisions characteristic of modern societies can be resolved in the same way as the collisions that brought about the downfall of previous societies. In what follows I will try to trace that hesitation.

Economy

In the *Essay on Natural Law* from 1802–03 Hegel draws on Plato's *Republic* to distinguish between the classes of free and unfree citizens. Whereas the former class is immediately devoted to the community as a whole, the latter is devoted to the sphere of labor and property. It is imperative, Hegel holds, that these two spheres be clearly separated from one another. The system of property

must constitute itself in a class of its own, and in that case must be able to expand in its whole length and breadth, really separate and isolated from the class of the nobility.¹³

Since citizens who pursue their private interests will contribute to the well-being of the society as a whole, the society must allow the realm of economic activity freely to expand. Although Hegel does not explicitly refer to the modern world in this context, he seems to understand modern civil society along the same lines:

[T]his class is determined by being at home in [the sphere of] possession as such and the kind of justice that is possible with regard to possession, and by constituting at the same time a coherent system, such that the relation of possession is taken up into a formal unity and each individual, being as

such capable of possession, is related to all others as a universal being, that is, as burgher in the sense of *bourgeois*.¹⁴

Citizens that are tied to one another by economic interests must be protected by a coherent system of civil law, regardless of their birth and social position. Thus, the realm of private interests must, on the one hand, be elevated above the random struggle for possession and, on the other, remain separated from the realm of the state. Whereas a society should profit from the positive effects of selfishness, the state should not allow the destructive effects of this selfishness to endanger its health. Hegel emphasizes that only by disentangling the realm of the state and the realm of private interests, “each of them is done justice, and that alone which ought to be is brought into existence” (494/104). He leaves open, however, whether a society—by means of the state—is always capable of subjugating the realm of economic interests to its proper ends. The *Jena System Draft* from 1803–04 suggests that it is particularly difficult for modern societies to control the destructive effects of the economic realm:

When, within a large nation, need and labor are elevated into this universality, they form on their own account a tremendous system of communality and mutual interdependence, a self-moving life of what is dead, a life which, in its motion, blindly moves back and forth like the elements and, like a wild beast, requires continual strict dominance and taming.¹⁵

Due to the random movements of the market, the coherence of the singular kind of labor with the whole infinite mass of needs becomes completely cluttered and a [matter of] blind dependence, so that some far-off operation often suddenly cuts off the labor of a whole class of men who were satisfying their needs by it, making it superfluous and useless.¹⁶

These passages suggest that modern societies may not be able to subjugate the “self-moving life” of the market to their proper end. This issue recurs in the *Philosophy of Right*. Civil society, Hegel here argues, facilitates the realization of selfish ends by means of

a system of all-encompassing dependence, so that the subsistence, welfare, and rights of the individual . . . are interwoven with, and grounded on, the subsistence, welfare, and rights

of all, and have actuality and security only in this context.
(*Philosophy of Right*, §183)

However, this passage concerns the *principle* of modern civil society rather than its actual existence. For the system of interdependence this society entails does not just create ever-new opportunities to satisfy ever-new needs. Actually, it yields at once the increasing opposition between a small group of property owners and a rabble deprived of the possibility to subsist by means of labor and hence of participating in the society as such.¹⁷ This problem cannot be solved, in Hegel's view, by public welfare or the artificial creation of jobs, for these solutions contradict the very principle of civil society:

It thus emerges that civil society, despite an excess of wealth, is not wealthy enough, that is, its own distinct resources are not sufficient to control the excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble. (§245; translation modified)

If the principle of particularity constitutive of civil society posits itself as an absolute principle, as it tends to do, then this society "affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both" (§185). Hegel, affirming that the problem of poverty "torments modern societies especially," offers no solution to this problem (§244, Addition).

In line with the first *Jena System Draft*, the *Philosophy of Right* here refers to a mode of dialectic governed not so much by reason as by the blind power of the market (§246). This negative dialectic, so to speak, pertains to the increasing unfolding of the contradiction between the principle of individual freedom and the actual lack of freedom. Hegel, well aware that philosophy cannot predict the future (*Philosophy of Right*, 26/21–22), leaves open whether the modern state will actually be able to resolve this contradiction. He might have argued that this question falls outside the scope of philosophy because it is dependent on contingent circumstances such as good government (*The Philosophy of History*, 539/456). Yet he may have had another reason for not suggesting a solution. For the conflict between the modern principle of freedom and the actual lack of freedom, a conflict created by the market, cannot be resolved by the emergence of a civilization based on a less one-sided determination of freedom. The modern determination of freedom simply cannot be surpassed. Yet Hegel seems to realize that the rational institutions based on this determination do not in themselves guarantee the actualization of freedom which constitutes the ultimate end of the

modern state. We will see that this state is not only vulnerable insofar as its relation to the market is concerned, but also with regard to the political realm itself.

Politics

Hegel, we have seen, considers the modern state to rest on the principle that the human being as such is free. This means for Hegel that the state should allow its citizens freely to develop their talents, yet without therefore letting its ends be determined by their arbitrary will (*Philosophy of Right*, §207). As I noted in the beginning, the *Philosophy of Right* is exclusively concerned with the essential determinations that follow from this basic principle, that is, with the *idea* of the modern state. Precisely because Hegel's account of the modern state is not limited to this principle alone, but embraces its necessary moments, the difference between the essential actuality of the state and its empirical existence is not always easy to tell. Hence the deliberate ambiguity of Hegel's equation of actuality and rationality in the preface (*Philosophy of Right*, 24/20).

I would like to emphasize that Hegel always attempts to expose the implications of a particular mode of thought from within. In order to articulate the "spirit" of the modern state, Hegel equally goes along with the insight of the modern state into its proper principle. The *Philosophy of Right* makes it clear that he holds this insight to have been achieved primarily by the moderate reformers who between 1807 and 1815 attempted to emancipate the Prussian state from its feudal institutions without, on the other hand, completely abolishing the traditional forms of local and national political participation.¹⁸ Hegel draws on the enlightened views of these thinkers, but he distinguishes itself from them by comprehending their ideas in light of the actualization of freedom at stake in the history of spirit as such. Since the principle of freedom entails the urge to actualize itself, Hegel can maintain, following Rousseau, that these ideas respond to the universal or rational will:

The main point [*Hauptsache*] is that freedom, as determined by the concept, is not grounded on the subjective will and on arbitrariness, but on the insight of the universal will, and that the system of freedom consists in the free development of the various moments of this freedom. The subjective will is a purely formal determination from which it does not follow *what* it wills. The rational will alone is universal in the

sense that it determines and develops itself from within and unfolds its moments as organic parts. (*Reason in History*, 144/121; translation modified)

It should be emphasized that this “rational will” is not to be equated with the will of an actual head of state or legislator. Whereas the individual will has no content of its own, the principle of rational freedom entails the urge to actualize its immanent determinations. This urge manifests itself whenever a mode of government is brought about that accords with the principle of freedom to a larger extent than the foregoing one, such as had happened in the various efforts to abolish feudalism and slavery. Even though particular princes, governments, or legislators may ground their decisions on a certain insight into what is rational in and for itself, their insight cannot be identified with this absolute rationality.

For Hegel, the modern state is primarily faced with the task of resolving the collision between the government and those who are governed (139–40/117). This means that it must, on the one hand, allow the particular powers to develop into relative totalities and, on the other, must guarantee that “they freely collaborate toward the realization of a single purpose.”¹⁹ Only thus can the distinction between the rational will of the society as a whole and the individual will of the citizens be resolved:

What finally matters is that an infinite distinction has been brought about and has been resolved into the insight of the individuals that their freedom, independence, and essence resides in their unity with that which is substantial, and that their actions are shaped by the latter. (*Reason in History*, 144/121; translation modified)

Whenever Hegel refers to what finally matters, to the main point, or to that which ought to be the case, he refers to the essential actuality of the modern state rather than to its empirical existence, albeit not always unambiguously. Other passages also make it clear that the organic model which Hegel regards as essential to the modern determination of freedom does not coincide with the Prussian state of his time. Thus, it is pivotal for Hegel that the sphere of the government and the sphere of the citizens be mediated by social estates and corporations representing the particular interests of the various parts of the population (*Philosophy of Right*, §302). In Prussia and elsewhere, these estates had traditionally represented the interests of the nobility and, to a lesser extent, the

cities. Between 1807 and 1815, various efforts were made to abolish the feudal structure of these estates and to transform them into modern institutions representing the interests of citizens at the level of local, regional, and national politics. Due to the resistance of the nobility and, after 1816, the defeat of Napoleon, most of these efforts at reform were never carried out or were quickly abandoned.²⁰ The traditional system of corporations, at odds with the idea of a free market, was dismantled around the same time.²¹ According to an addition to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel considers these developments a great loss:

For some time now, organization has only been directed from above, and this kind of organization has been the main concern [of the government]. The lower level, the mass-like whole is easily left more or less inorganic. Yet it is extremely important that it be organized, because only then does it constitute a power, a force; otherwise it is merely an aggregate, an amount of scattered atoms. Legitimate power only resides in the organic existence of the particular spheres.²²

Thus, Hegel holds that the collision between the government and those who are governed must be resolved by mediating institutions that represent the interests of particular groups, yet in such a way that their “legitimate power” remains subordinated to the rational end of the society as a whole. He does not suggest, however, that modern societies will *actually* be able to organize themselves in accordance with this essential actuality. Whereas “the rational concept of the state” has overcome the opposition between government and people, actual states continue to be defined by this very opposition. As long as this is the case, Hegel notes, “it cannot be said that the state—which is the unity of the universal and the particular will—has already become actual” (*Reason in History*, 142/119).

According to Hegel, the participation of citizens in local and national politics is to be achieved through estates and corporations rather than through democracy.²³ He would not oppose the view that democracy is meant to protect a society against the arbitrary will of its monarch. Hegel did not embrace democracy as the right way of achieving this aim, however, because in his view it gives free rein to an arbitrariness even more difficult to control than the one it was supposed to overcome:

Not satisfied with the establishment of rational rights . . . liberalism opposes to all this the atomistic principle of the individual wills. . . . Due to this formal determination of freedom, to this

abstraction, these individual wills prevent the establishment of a firm organization. Freedom forthwith opposes the particular decisions of the government, for these are the result of a particular will and hence of arbitrariness. The cabinet collapses through the will of the many, and the former opposition takes its place. Yet the latter, having become the government, is in its turn opposed by the many. . . . It is this collision, this tangle [*Knoten*], this problem, that now challenges history and that it has to resolve in future times.²⁴

Thus, the problem Hegel considers to be inherent in democracy is not so much that a majority elects the government, but that an elected government cannot, in the long run, represent the universal will. Such a government is necessarily reduced to a particular will which, as such, becomes opposed to another particular will. Again, Hegel leaves open whether modern societies will actually be able to subordinate the spurious infinity that haunts the succession of elected governments to its proper ends.²⁵ His remarks on democracy are, of course, not directed against the state as such. They might be used, however, to argue that *any* government—whether elected or not—seeks to establish itself as the universal will of the society by effacing its proper particularity. If this is the case, then its effort to extricate itself from this particularity might well turn into the repression of modes of particularity it finds over against itself. Upon this view, the endless succession of particular wills that constitutes the inherent threat of democracy only manifests a threat inherent in the political order as such.

For Hegel, we have seen, the modern state requires that the universal will of the government and the individual wills of the citizens be mediated by estates and corporations representing their particular interests. It might be argued that in our age this mediating function has been taken over by labor unions, political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and a network of welfare provisions. A society is rational, Hegel holds, insofar as its government succeeds in controlling the selfish tendency of the mediating institutions on which its well-being depends. He does not suggest, however, that modern states will actually be able to control the proper force of such institutions. Hegel was aware that modern societies suffer, first, from the tendency of particular wills to isolate themselves from the whole and, second, from the incapacity of democracy to bring about the unity of the universal and the particular will. These problems undoubtedly continue to challenge the contemporary world.

Hegel's Present

So far I have argued that Hegel's unbridled optimism mainly concerns the actualization of rational freedom such as it has occurred in the past. We have also seen that Hegel is much more cautious with regard to his present time. This caution tends to be neglected, however, because he does not always clearly distinguish between the basic insight of the modern world into its ultimate principle and the actualization of this principle in the realm of temporal externality. Insofar as this basic insight is concerned, Hegel is—at least according to his own standards—justified to be as optimistic as he is about the past, for speculative science has, in his view, achieved the most profound comprehension of this principle. This does not imply, however, that “the fundamental reconciliation” of the spiritual and the actual world (*Reason in History*, 256/208) has already occurred in the element of world history, an element much more obstinate than that of pure thought. Hegel's remarks at the end of *Reason in History* are utterly ambiguous in this respect:

Freedom finds its concept in the actual world and has transformed the worldly sphere into an objective system that is concrete and structured organically. . . . It is the goal of world history that spirit create for itself a nature and world conform to itself. (256–57/208; translation modified)

History, for Hegel, proves that this goal has been attained in principle. That is why he relegates “the work which still needs to be done” to “the empirical side.”²⁶ Although the actualization of freedom in the element of externality may still take time,

temporal duration is something entirely relative, and spirit belongs to eternity. . . . The further work [of spirit] requires that this principle [i.e., the unity of the rational and the actual] develop itself, that spirit become actual, that it achieve consciousness of itself in the actual world. (*Reason in History*, 257/209; translation modified)

These and other passages suggest that the reconciliation of the rational and the actual has as yet become “for itself” in the element of thought alone.²⁷ Thus, Hegel acknowledges the tension between, on the one hand, the essential actualization of rational freedom that has manifested itself in the past and, on the other, the incapacity of the

modern world actually to conform to the rational freedom that constitutes its ultimate principle. He attempts to resolve this tension, however, by arguing that the further actualization of freedom is merely a matter of time. Whereas the abstract negativity proper to time may slow down the self-actualization of the concept, it must, in the long run, comply with the absolute negativity proper to the latter.

I do not wish to suggest that time might turn out to be more powerful than Hegel took it to be. I would rather maintain that Hegel effaced the unsettling sway of the negative by framing negativity in terms of the opposition between absolute and abstract negativity. His dialectical determination of this opposition dissolves, in Hegel's own words, the negative into something subordinate and conquered (*Reason in History*, 48/42–43). Whereas Hegel, as I have argued, intimated the disruptive implications of the modern conception of freedom, the principle of his philosophy did not allow him to comprehend these implications in the same way as it allowed him to comprehend the past. As I see it, Hegel's remarks on these implications do not anticipate an age that would no longer be modern, but rather a mode of modernity that is impelled to acknowledge the one-sidedness of its very principle.

The Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* suggests that Plato was aware of the principle of individual freedom that began to emerge in Greek culture, but was unable to incorporate this principle into his account of Greek ethical life:

Plato, aware that the ethics of his time were being penetrated by a deeper principle, which, within this context, could appear . . . only as a destructive force, . . . imagined he could counter [this] destructive force, and he thereby inflicted the gravest damage on the deeper drive behind it, namely free infinite personality.²⁸

According to Hegel, Plato tried to counter the principle of individual freedom. In the same vein, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* might be regarded as an attempt to counter the destructive implications of this very principle. As we have seen, Hegel did this by pleading for institutions capable of bridging the gap between the state and its citizens. Ultimately, he pursued the same end by distinguishing between absolute and abstract negativity and defining the latter as a subordinate moment of the former. This allowed him, I have suggested, to hold that even modernity must, in the end, be able to overcome the conflicts to which it gave birth.

Part of Hegel's future has become our recent past. Although societies plunged into social, political, and economical disintegration have proved to be capable of evolving new modes of self-organization,

it can longer be taken for granted that the modern world will succeed in reconciling such contrary moments as freedom and power, hospitality and security, universality and particularity, the individual and the community, progress and tradition, prosperity and oppression, technology and ethics, reason and faith. If such contrary moments do not necessarily yield their reconciliation, and if contemporary philosophy is to comprehend its own time, then it should attempt, in my view, to affirm their tragic entanglement. Rather than opposing the tragic essence of such conflicts as a destructive force, it should attempt to incorporate this essence into its very principle. Whereas the principle of speculative science did not allow Hegel to do this, it cannot be done, in my view, without returning to Hegel.

Notes

1. See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol. II: The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1945), 27–80. Among the authors who have opposed this identification I mention only T. M. Knox, “Hegel and Prussianism,” in *Hegel's Political Philosophy*, ed. W. Kaufmann (New York: Atherton, 1970), 13–29, and S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). See also A. Wood's Introduction to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

2. *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte Band I, Die Vernunft in der Geschichte (1822/1831)*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner 1994) / *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975), 48/42–43, translation modified. Cf., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte (1822–31)*, ed. E. Moldauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) / *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991), 28/15.

3. See Avineri, 154; T. E. Wartenberg, “Poverty and Class Structure in Hegel's Theory of Civil Society,” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 8 (1981): 169–82; John McCumber, “Contradiction and Resolution in the State: Hegel's Covert View,” in *Clio* 15, no.4 (1986): 379–90; A. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 237–55. Contrary to McCumber, I will not consider the differences between Hegel's published works and the various lecture courses devoted to the philosophy of right.

4. I have argued elsewhere that Hegel's own conception of tragic conflicts can be deployed for this purpose. K. de Boer, “Tragic Entanglements: Between Hegel and Derrida,” in *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 48 (2003): 33–48.

5. Spirit “makes itself into its own object and its own content. Knowledge is its form and function, but its content is the spiritual itself.” *Reason in*

History, 54/47. "The essence of spirit, then, is self-consciousness." *Reason in History*, 59/51, cf. 74/64, 122/102. Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) interprets Hegel's conception of spirit along traditional lines, namely, as cosmic spirit (16), larger rational plan (23), and a self-positing God (36) that embodies itself in certain parcels of the universe (26). For this reason, he cannot but attempt to extricate those elements of Hegel's philosophy of right and world history he takes to be relevant today from Hegel's "ontology of *Geist*," which he considers to be "close to incredible" (69, cf. 111). Although this separation results in a lucid account of Hegel's conception of the modern state, it is to be regretted that Taylor discards a conception of spirit that has very little to do with Hegel's philosophy of world history. In a similar vein, Wood (4–6) rejects Hegel's dialectical logic while defending his political philosophy.

6. "A nation [*Volk*] should therefore be regarded as a spiritual individual, and we are not primarily concerned with its external side, but rather with . . . the spirit of the nation, that is, its self-consciousness in respect of its own truth and essence. . . . The universal which emerges and becomes conscious within the state . . . is what we call in general the nation's culture [*Bildung*]. But the determinate content which this universal form acquires . . . is the spirit of the nation itself." *Reason in History*, 114–15/96–97; translation modified, cf. 59/51, 61/53, *The Philosophy of History*, 30–31/17–18.

7. Philosophy, according to Hegel, penetrates into the rational core of the state "in order to find the inner pulse, and to feel its beat even in the external forms" (*PR*, 25/20). He takes care to distinguish between these rational forms, however, and "the infinitely varied circumstances which take shape within this externality" (25/20). Cf. *PR*, §2, §258 Remark (400/276). On this see Houlgate (2005, 182). As regards world history, Hegel distinguishes between three basic determinations of the principle of freedom. In accordance with the logical moments of the concept as such, this principle can be determined as the principle that one is free, that several are free, or that the human being as such is free. Hegel connects this logical distinction to (1) the Oriental world, (2) the Greek and Roman world, and (3) the modern world (*RH*, 61–63/53–55, cf. 155–57/129–31, *LPH*, 31–32/18–19).

8. *The Philosophy of History*, 96/71; *Reason in History*, 65/56.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Reason in History*, 27/26, 30/29. Hegel notes in the *Encyclopaedia* that the empirical sciences, discovering general determinations, species, and laws, bring about the content that is subsequently taken up by philosophy. "The reception into philosophy of these materials . . . is at the same time a development of thought out of itself. Whereas philosophy thus owes its development to the empirical sciences, it gives their contents the form . . . of the a priori character of thought, thus affirming their necessity." *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse I* (1817–30), ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) / *Hegel's Logic*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) §12 Remark; translation modified.

11. Hegel refers in this respect to morality (*The Philosophy of History*, 17/6, 91/67; *Reason in History*, 18/21, 79–80/68–69), sadness (*Reason in History*, 34/32), and piety (41/37).

12. On Hegel's view, only the category of rational, self-conscious freedom allows philosophy adequately to distinguish the essential from the nonessential: "In order to be able to do this, one must know the essential, and, with regard to world history as a whole, this essence is . . . the consciousness of freedom, and the phases which this consciousness assumes in developing itself. Insofar as thought is directed to this category it is directed to the truly essential." *The Philosophy of History*, 88/65; translation modified.

13. "Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts, seine Stelle in der praktischen Philosophie und sein Verhältnis zu den positiven Wissenschaften," in *Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) / *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 492/102.

14. *Natural Law*, 494/103; translation modified; cf. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821), ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) / *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §185.

15. *Jenaer Systementwürfe I. Das System der spekulativen Philosophie* (1803–04), ed. K. Düsing and H. Kimmerle (Hamburg: Meiner 1986) / "Hegel's First Philosophy of Spirit," in *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit*, trans. H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 230/249; translation modified. In the *System of Ethical Life* (1802/03) Hegel refers to the system of need as "an alien power over which [man] has no control." The whole of needs and surplus "is a scarcely knowable, invisible, and incalculable power," *System der Sittlichkeit* (1802–03), ed. G. Lasson (Hamburg: Meiner, 1967) / "The System of Ethical Life," in *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit*, 492/167. Hegel, like Marx, draws at least on the work of Adam Smith, to which he refers explicitly ("Hegel's First Philosophy of Spirit," 230/249) and implicitly ("The System of Ethical Life," 492/167). As is well known, Marx had no access to these early texts.

16. "Hegel's First Philosophy of Spirit," 230/248; cf. *Jenaer Systementwürfe III. Naturphilosophie und Philosophie des Geistes (1805–06)*, ed. R.-P. Horstmann (Hamburg: Meiner 1987) / *Hegel and the Human Spirit. A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805–6)*, trans. L. Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 222–24/138–40; see Avineri (87–98) for a clear account of Hegel's Jena texts on modern economy and civil society.

17. *Philosophy of Right*, §§241–45. On this issue see Avineri (47–54), Wartenberg, McCumber, and Wood (247–55). I agree with Wood's suggestion that Hegel's philosophy, since it has no answer to the problem of poverty and oppression inherent in the modern state, here begins to reveal its limits (255). However, Wood does not elaborate on the implications of this view. Wartenberg,

on the other hand, argues convincingly that Hegel's explicit conception of the threefold structure of civil society is at odds with his implicit acknowledgment of the emerging opposition between owners and workers. I agree with Wartenberg that Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* could not incorporate this latter class structure into his philosophical account of the modern state.

18. When the *Philosophy of Right* was published, the conservative reaction against the reform movement was gaining the upper hand. Hegel, who was indirectly involved with representatives of the reform movement, tried to get round the censors—and to preserve his position at the university—by including some ambiguous remarks on the modern state and an unambiguous attack of Fries in its preface. During these years, Hegel received some protection from the reformed minister of culture Von Altenstein, to whom he owed his appointment. For a detailed account see T. Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) ch. 10–11, and G. Heiman, "The Sources and Significance of Hegel's Corporate Doctrine," in *Hegel's Political Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Z. A. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 111–35. H. Klenner, "Preussische Eule oder gallischer Hahn? Hegels Rechtsphilosophie zwischen Revolution und Reform," in *Preussische Reformen: Wirkungen und Grenzen*, Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR (Akademie-Verlag Berlin, 1982), 125–36, argues that Hegel's ideas concerning the rationally structured state are compatible with the constitution proposed by the reformers Humboldt and Stein. He refers to many elements of Hegel's account that deviate from the effort to reinforce an absolutist organization of the state. See also Avineri (70, 161–75) and Wood (12–14).

19. *Reason in History*, 147/123; cf. 143/119–20.

20. Hegel's use of the term *Stand* (estate) covers various ways in which people with particular interests might organize themselves and have their rights represented in local, regional, or national politics. Whereas the term *estate* traditionally referred to the representative organs of the nobility and the cities of a particular province, reformers such as Stein tried to emancipate these representative organs from their feudal origin. Stein also tried—unsuccessfully—to extend this reformed system of political representation to national politics. See R. Kosselleck, *Preussen zwischen Reform und Revolution. Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung und soziale Bewegung von 1791 bis 1848* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1975) for a detailed account of these developments. Hegel basically distinguishes between the estates belonging to civil society (social classes) and the estates participating in national politics (cf. *Philosophy of Right*, §298–315, in particular §303 Remark; "The System of Ethical Life," 495/170).

21. Hegel notes in an "addition" that in modern times the corporations had been abolished, since everybody was now supposed to take care of himself. Hegel consents that the traditional system of self-contained guilds should not be revived. He holds, however, that modern corporations, uniting citizens according to their trade, profession, or confession, were a necessary means to ward off the atomism promoted by modern liberal theories (*Philosophy of Right*, §255 Addition). See Pinkard, 420.

22. *Philosophy of Right*, §290 Addition; translation modified. Needless to say that Hegel considers an “organic” organization of the masses to imply their subordination to the government; hence his critique of the notion of popular sovereignty (cf. *Philosophy of Right*, §279).

23. *Philosophy of Right*, §279, 447/319; cf. §311 Remark. At this point Hegel distances himself from the liberal reformers who pleaded for a democratic constitution.

24. *The Philosophy of History*, 534–35/452; translation modified; cf. *Reason in History*, 146/122.

25. Cf. *Philosophy of Right*, §311 Remark.

26. *Reason in History*, 257/209. Cf., “But if we say that universal reason accomplishes itself, this has of course nothing to do with individual empirical instances; the latter may fare either well or badly, as the case may be, for the concept has granted contingency and particularity the power to exercise their tremendous right in the empirical sphere” (76/66; translation modified).

27. *Reason in History*, 256/208. In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel refers to speculative science as the mode of spirit in which spirit comprehends itself as absolute spirit. He does not say, however, that this science has become actual in all respects. He merely remarks that his *lectures* have reached the present point of view, such that there remains, for the time being, nothing more to tell: “[T]he series of spiritual forms is . . . for the present [*für jetzt*] concluded. At this point I bring this history of philosophy to a close.” *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III* (1805–31) / *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, trans. E. S. Haldane and H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 460–61/552. However, this end at the same time constitutes a beginning, for Hegel expresses the hope that his lectures will encourage his students to grasp “the spirit of the time . . . and pull it out of its natural state, that is, of its concealment and lifelessness into the light of day” (462/533; translation modified). Much work therefore remains to be done.

28. *Philosophy of Right*, 24/20; cf. §46 Remark, §185 Remark.

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Hegel and the Logics of History

John McCumber

Hegel taught us all that one of the most important things we have to do in order to be rational animals—perhaps *the* most important thing—is comprehend our own history. We cannot be truly human unless we understand history, not merely “from outside,” but as *our* history—as a series of developments from which we have resulted and to which we must connect by seeking to carry some of them forward and stymie others.

This lesson is now accepted to such a degree that the refusal to examine one’s own history regularly turns out to have a *pathological* basis, as in the case of mainstream American philosophy.¹ It is, in other words, not even normal, to say nothing of rational or decent. Such is what we might call the post-Hegelian consensus in global culture.

But if Hegel taught us that we must comprehend our own history, there is another lesson which many people think he did not teach us, and that is how to go about doing so. Certainly Hegel’s own view of history, as usually viewed, is hardly a model for such comprehension. It is what Jean-François Lyotard called a “master narrative,”² which begins by rejecting Africa as, literally, prehistoric; thrusts something called “the Orient” under the juggernaut of what can only be called “colonial reason”; and disposes of Hellenic and post-Hellenic Western history, that is, all of Western history, by burying it under reams of praise. Everything finally comes to rest in the Rector’s Office of the University of Berlin, inhabited by Herr Doktor Hegel, “secretary to the World-Spirit.”

We can all agree, I take it, that this is not the right way to understand history. I believe as well that it is not the right way to understand Hegel. In this chapter, I will sketch what I think is the right way and then use it to try and illuminate something Hegel knew nothing about: the contemporary world situation.

Part I: Hegel without a Master Narrative

Hegel's philosophy of history, Karl Popper to the contrary notwithstanding, is not intended to provide us with explanations for historical events. Instead, it offers us a general schema into which historical phenomena can be fitted. What this schema purports to tell us is not how those phenomena came to be, but what they are: which of their features are basic and historically effective and which are merely passing contingencies. It aims to answer what Socrates recurrently identifies (e.g., at *Republic* 354b) as the most basic kind of question: *ti esti* rather than *dioti*.

We are all familiar with Hegel's basic schema, for his use of it is not limited to his philosophy of history but runs through his entire philosophy. It is a narrative structure and tells us that anything we wish to understand philosophically (*begreifen*) must be viewed as developing in three stages:

1. It exists in simple, undifferentiated form;
2. It passes over into opposition to other things;
3. It is transformed by that opposition and returns to the form of simple immediacy having gained a richer content.

To exhibit this narrative structure—to go through this kind of development, or to be reconstructable as having gone through this kind of development—is what it is, then, to be historically real for Hegel.

This narrative structure is probably derived from the Neoplatonic movement *archê—proodos—epistrophê*, or *on-zôê-noêsis*,³ which was the overall pattern of development for any thing. In the *Phenomenology*, it is called a development from Notion (*Begriff*) through Experience (*Erfahrung*) and back to Notion. In a more subjective vein, it is also called the passage from Certainty through Experience (again) to Truth. In a more “logical” vein it is referred to as a passage from positivity to negation to negation of negation. In the *Science of Logic*, it is the passage from “formal” to “real” to “absolute.”

It is when we apply this schema to history that its true twisted genius becomes apparent. For the fact that 2 transforms 1, that is, produces anomalies to 1 which require that 1 become 3, means that what Hegel has come up with is most basically a schema for things-not-fitting-into-schemata. Hegel's basic logic of history is then *ironic* in nature. This is presumably what he means by characterizing philosophy, in a letter to von Sinclair, as “nothing but a struggle against its own beginning.”⁴ Even

philosophy's own schemata, its concepts, must be continually transformed and modified as time goes by. It's *never* the same old story.

What renders historical events, like all "real" phenomena, forever anomalous to the Concept is the way they exist:

[I]ndeed, the Concept, the truth in itself, is one thing, and the existence which does or does not correspond to it is another. In finite reality, the determinations which belong to truth appear as an externality, as a separation of that which, in its truth, is inseparable.⁵

The external separation here is ultimately that of space and time, the two empty "containers" of all natural objects. Because space and time are empty, there is no reason for a natural object to be located at any particular place within either of them; the entire universe could perfectly well be three feet to the left, and twenty years older. So could the sun. So, then, could you, insofar as you are a purely material object (as living, historical, or *geistig*, you could not).

Certain things in nature simply cannot be explained, and this is what gives rise to what Hegel calls the "impotence of nature," its incapacity to display the concept.⁶ The irony of history may in turn be viewed as a corollary of this impotence. Nature, after all, is in us as well as out there. It is the weak, natural side of our humanity that continually causes us to act in selfish, stupid, and shortsighted ways, which, the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* tells us, on rare occasions advance the human cause.⁷

Insofar as "finite reality" exists as a succession of moments in time, then, it is other than the Concept—and so nonrational. Because Hegel's Concept is narrative in structure—the schema I mentioned earlier—this failure of rationality is not a static mismatch between Concept and reality, as if they were two photographs taken from different angles. Rather, the impotence of nature means that natural things do not develop the way the Concept does—via a continuous movement from 1 to 2 to 3:

What conducts the forward development is the inner dialectic of the thought-formations. . . . What has form is determinate. . . . But then it is something finite; and what is finite is not true, is not what it ought to be. It contradicts its content, the Idea; it must perish. That it can exist, of course, means that it has the idea in it. But because it is determinate, its form is finite and its existence is one-sided and limited.⁸

At best, then, the philosophical development and the real development run parallel to one another, so to speak, for a stretch: real things, as Hegel puts it, “exist.” But then history surprises us, and they “perish”: the real state of things diverges from the Conceptual development.⁹ And when they diverge, our logic may have to be revised, to take into account the new developments.¹⁰

Once we have made the simple statement that history is ironic, that it surprises us, no further single characterization of history is possible. This is not to say that history is wholly illogical, that it has nothing to do with logic—that would make it an entirely random series of episodes and would deprive everything of what Hegel calls “existence.” Rather, the events of history exhibit logical development from time to time. Rather than presenting us with a single logical progression, history presents us with a plurality of logical developments, which in surprising us force us to revise our logic itself. History follows logics—not *a* logic.

Hegel’s System, though he himself applied it to history in the form of a single “metanarrative,” thus offers resources that are to be used, not as Hegel used, them, but on a piecemeal basis. This is not a new view of Hegel, for each of these resources—these little conceptual genealogies—can be approximated to what my teacher, Emil Fackenheim, called “partial mediations.” To paraphrase something Fackenheim once said to me: “What has Hegel left us? He has left us a whole series of partial mediations.”

Hegel, as we all know, cannot be expounded but only interpreted. There are many criteria by which to judge an interpretation of Hegel. This one, as Fackenheim implied, has the merit of being useful.

Part II: Hegel and the Cold War

As Hegel himself suggested (a suggestion I will discuss in Part IV), it is impossible to use Hegel’s schema to predict. Now we see why, and that this failure of prediction is central to Hegel’s philosophy of history. What the irony of history is all about, in fact, is the failure of prediction.

It is therefore quite striking that Hegel, at the age of thirty-one, should have predicted the cold war. He did it through his Jena critique of Fichte.

Philosophy, for Fichte, is the carrying through of a principle whose consequences are drawn but which, once established, is never challenged. The consequences of such a “principled” approach are at their most problematic, for Hegel, in Fichte’s social theory. Hegel draws them most cleanly in *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Phi-*

losophy of 1802, which leans in turn on *Faith and Knowledge*, published the year before. I discussed them in the Introduction to my 1993 *The Company of Words*, so I will briefly summarize what I said there.¹¹

Philosophy's basic principle, for Fichte, is of course "the ego posits itself." What is the ego? Since the principle stated is basic, the ego must be defined entirely in terms of it—that is, as simply that which posits itself. This is then an empty but absolute ego, formed by abstraction from all content—an abstraction that in fact is an absolutely free self-positing.

Philosophy for Fichte also carries through its principle on another level, however. This is the (hardly deniable) empirical level, on which we experience ourselves not as absolutely free but as empirical individuals at the mercy of others, inhabiting cultures and a universe that we have not made and which to some degree make us.

Because the principles of these two levels are absolute, Fichte never explains their unity. The fundamental, "all-dominating principle" engaged here is just that each side is absolutely what the other is not.¹² This means, Hegel claims, that each rational being exists for Fichte in a twofold way: as a free and rational self-positing being, and as mere matter to be manipulated and formed. This dichotomy in rational beings such as ourselves is a corollary of the wider "all-dominating" principle just mentioned, and so (Hegel tells us in the *Differenzschrift*) it too is absolutized: each side of us is what the other side is not, and this dichotomy in our nature cannot be transgressed.¹³

Because of the absoluteness of this dichotomy, society and in particular the political realm must be founded strictly on one principle or the other: the individual must be either a free being of infinite worth, or mere matter. To take the latter course is to locate rationality not in the individual but above her, in the community—more specifically in the rational community, the state. As *Faith and Knowledge* puts it,

According to the principle of the system, the lawful, and the erection of the lawful as of the state, is a being-for-self, absolutely opposed to liveliness and individuality . . . finds itself under absolute tyranny. The law ought to prevail [*das Recht soll geschehen*] not as inner but as external freedom of individuals, which is just their being subsumed under a completely alien concept.¹⁴

The individual thus sinks under a mass of laws and regulations, each rationally enacted for the greater good of the whole. Such a state, the *Differenzschrift* tells us, is a "machine."¹⁵

Also countenanced by Fichte's system, however, is the other side of its basic opposition, in which the individual as such is immediately accorded infinite worth. In such a state, according to *Faith and Knowledge*, morality assumes the form of "raising all moral contingencies into the form of the concept and giving immorality [*Unsittlichkeit*] justification and a good conscience."¹⁶

This kind of social order justifies immorality because on its principles, the only reason for doing anything is the personal arbitrary insight of individuals, in which I pick and choose my moral principles to coincide with my own wishes:

So, if self-determination is to come about, everything depends on reckoning out a verdict on the preferability of one duty to another and choosing among these conditioned duties *according to one's best insight*. . . . In this way self-determination passes over into the contingency of insight and, with that, into unawareness of what it is that decides a contingent insight.¹⁷

I, as an individual, am of infinite worth; all other things have worth only if I choose them. And since my choice is the source of all value, it can be subject to no higher standards: it is my *arbitrary* whim that determines what is good and what is bad.

Hegel's presentation of this alternative ought to be startlingly familiar today. For the two societies that dominated the world in the aftermath of World War II are easily recognizable as the two approaches Hegel has contrasted here, though blown up to enormous size and pushed to preposterous lengths.

One of these societies was dominated by a relentlessly "rational" state structure, which exercised control over all expression and conduct. This Rational State built up cities and factories in the wilderness, and prison camps as well. It discharged pollutants in the air, poisoning those nearby in the name of those far away who needed what the polluting factories produce. It recognized no human needs beyond the material or economic, and its leaders were proud to refer to their followers as "the masses."

The contrasting society granted to each individual, no matter how childish, ignorant, ill, or depraved, the right to determine his or her own life. This society could not, therefore, keep its criminals and insane off its streets. It was unable, even, to educate its young, who as individuals had a spectrum of "rights." Because individual insight was the only criterion of right and wrong, this society was incapable of uniting for a

sustained attack on any social problem. Its leaders, secure in a well-paid individuality which they sought at all costs to preserve, grew sleeker and more self-satisfied as the chaos around them intensified.

Each approach eventually generated its own internal opposition. The overwhelming disciplinary apparatus of the Rational State, says the *Differenzschrift*, silenced and isolated its inhabitants, until the people became “an atomistic multitude without life, elements . . . whose connection is endless domination”: tyranny bred the emptiest kind of individualism.¹⁸ On the other hand, reliance on individual insight leads as we saw to “unawareness” of moral criteria, and beyond that to atrophy of moral and political argumentation. The clash of individual standpoints on the other society thus became more and more superficial, relativism became the universal norm, and the individuals themselves grew more and more homogenous, their minds effectively identical in their closure.¹⁹

Isaiah Berlin has noted that none of the great social thinkers of history, on whose intellectual capital we continue to draw, foresaw any of the “great ideological storms” that raged through the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰ But it seems that Hegel, just past his thirtieth birthday, foresaw with frightening accuracy the ideological rigidity that marked the cold war.

This, I take it, is a stunning victory of Hegelian thought. Given a particular state of affairs, Hegel has shown—more than a century *avant la réalité*—what it is. And what it is, most basically, is a *philosophical* failure—the failure to get beyond Fichte (or at least Hegel’s Fichte). The whole logic of the postwar era was what Hegel would call Fichtean. He uncovered that logic, showed it to be supported by and expressed in a certain sort of philosophy, and proposed a remedy: himself. Thus, as the twentieth century entered its final decade, the time seemed finally ripe for Hegel. The Hegelian reconciliation of Spirit with Nature, mind with matter, was, at long last, on history’s agenda.

And what did we get? We got a surprise: the Rational State collapsed of its own weight, and only the individualistic one was left. What would Hegel make of this? What underlying philosophical logic—or logics—might he call into play?

Part III: Beyond Hegel

Hegel, to be sure, does not tell us. But his thought has resources that enable us to understand what has happened since the fall of the wall in 1989. The basic principle of my reconstruction of this will be what I call “minimal negation,” or what Hegel called “determinate negation”:

we make only the smallest possible change in the previous stage to get to the next one.²¹

The problem with the 1989 victory of closed-minded, whimsical individualism was that it had not overcome the Fichtean opposition that defined it. It still needed to be what the other was not—only now, the other really was not. This meant two things:

1. The surviving society, which we may as well call the “U.S.,” became even more what it had been, for the only difference as far as the U.S. was concerned between post-1989 and pre-1989 was that the U.S. now had no enemy to oppose it.²² Changing minimally, it therefore became even more a congeries of whimsical individuals. Of course, some national decisions still had to be made. They too became more and more whimsically individualistic. Because they were individualistic, they needed an individual to make them, so the government eventually fell, arbitrarily of course, into the hands of one individual—the Decider.

The Decider’s decisions, being basic, were not conditioned by anything. He therefore made no effort to inform himself of the realities of the world; indulged in no reflection on them; betrayed no educated awareness of his or his country’s own limitations. There was no thinking through of goals, no discussion. The Decider looked into his heart and accomplished his mission, which was not to achieve anything but merely to produce pure, absolute decisions, one after another.

Since any national course of action had value solely because it had been decided upon by the Decider, a decision, once made, could not be criticized or rethought. Decisions could only be carried out and maintained. All courses had to be stayed.

2. But this society was still subservient to Fichtean terms in that it still needed to be what the other society was not. This, after all, was what had provided to the society such social coherence as it had had. It needed an Opponent in which all value was not posited by the individual but by something over and above her, on a higher plane. Only this could not be a material plane, because that was what had failed: the state rationality of the Soviet Union had led to material catastrophes of many sorts. Therefore, all value had to be located still

higher—on a spiritual plane. The Opponent took the form of a rigid, fundamentalist religious community whose laws were all-encompassing, absolute, and unchangeable.

What resources does Hegel give us to understand the nature of this Opponent—*ti esti?* If we apply Hegelian categories on the piecemeal basis I have advocated, we can call in, first, the “Unhappy Consciousness” section of the *Phenomenology*,²³ in which individual consciousness tries to unite with an unchangeable supersensible realm.

The Opponent is thus not an individual, but a community whose only desire is to unite with the Unchangeable. In this community, as in the rational state, the individual is meaningless. Indeed, the Opponent is founded on the concept of war against the self. It is a community of ascetics, even cave dwellers, whose only activity is *submission* to the Unchangeable law. Because the Unchangeable law is unchangeable, it is not to be found on earth. Uniting with it therefore requires one’s death, and the Opponent is not merely an ascetic community but a death-worshipping one. The highest form of submission is then suicide in the name of the Unchangeable.

But we must keep changes minimal. The Opponent has developed out of the Rational State by shifting the source of all rational value from the nation as a whole to a divine other world. The relation of individuals to that world is one of submission. But this imperative is phrased without respect to any difference that might obtain among individuals. It would be an extra move to differentiate among individuals and restrict submission, say, just to members of the Opponent community. All human beings, then, must submit. Like the Rational State, the Opponent thus seeks to bring all humanity under its control; but unlike the Rational State, which was a being of this earth, the Opponent seeks to perfect their submission by bringing them death.

Only it cannot achieve universal submission, because its view of individuals is incorrect. Since in its view the only activity of an individual is submission, it views all individuals as exactly alike. Only they are not: humans come in many shapes and backgrounds, and so there is more to each of them than merely an activity of submission to divine law. This means that even submission will be carried out differently by different people. Since submission is absolute and that which is submitted to is unchanging, the Opponent cannot tolerate this. Any submission that is not exactly like the submission of the Opponent must then be rejected, and the Opponent falls into the category of what the *Science of Logic* calls the “excluding One.”²⁴

This second Hegelian resource is a logic of exclusion which bars from a given speech community anyone who disagrees with its basic presuppositions. It is the logic that is in play in the *Phenomenology* when Hegel writes of

this vanity, which understands how to frustrate every truth and to return from truth to itself, and which revels in this understanding; which always knows how to dissolve all thoughts and, instead of any content, to find only [its own] jejune ego; is a satisfaction which must be left to itself; for it flees the universal and seeks only Being-for-self.²⁵

Since such exclusion can never be rational, there is no good reason for carrying it out—and so no bad reason either. Once it begins, then, there is no place to end. It progresses down a slippery slope leading to civil war and, beyond that, to fatal sectarianism. Its final result is a single person, living alone and far away (perhaps in a distant mountain cave), conducting his own virtually private religion, rejected by his co-religionists, his family, and everyone else who really knows him. He has only the most temporary of communities—people who come to him for a few months or years, but then fall out with him and go their own ways. This person, the counterpart to the Decider, is the Submitter.

We now have a fully developed example of the irony of history. The Land of Individualism, the Home of the Free, has become a country whose inhabitants blindly support the whimsical decisions of their Decider. The Opponent community, founded upon utter submission to a universally valid religious law, has become a congeries of warring troglodytes, like the Cyclopes of Homer: *toisin d'out' agorai boulêphoroi oute themistes* (*Odyssey* IX 112).

This is not, of course, the only possible account of the contemporary situation; it is not even the only possible *Hegelian* account. To assert that would be to say that the account could not be overturned on Hegelian premises, and would deny the most basic of those premises: that history is ironical. Still, I think that it is *a* Hegelian account; and if it illuminates certain features of the contemporary historical landscape, that is another victory for Hegel. I sense him smiling, and hope that the twinkle in his eye is not itself ironical.

Part IV: Resolution

If I have been right so far, Hegelian thought provides categories to understand both the cold war and today's struggle with terrorism. Can

it go beyond and offer a tentative prediction of what will come out of this?

Hegel would not want us to do so. He has this to say about our ultimate future (and the deepest desire of the Submitter), death:

Mere privation, which is what death is, is not to be confounded with the feeling of being alive, which is positive; and there is no reason for worrying oneself about it. It is no concern of ours whether [the future] is or is not; we are to have no uneasiness on that account. This is the correct way to think about the future.²⁶

Since the future is by definition mere privation, it is essentially a mere empty spot in our knowledge. We cannot, therefore, fill it in: we cannot use Hegelian thought to predict. So, at least, thinks Hegel. But he goes too far here. He may be right about death, and even about *the* future; but as Heidegger shows, *our* future is not merely privation. It is a concrete impending something whose nature we do not yet know: a specific, finite future.²⁷ If we cannot predict it with certainty, we can at least diagnose it by looking at the instabilities in the present (Hegel would call them “contradictions”). What are they?

The Decider occupies a unique position: as an individual, he makes decisions that are valid for an entire society. In and of itself, this is a contradiction: in an absolutely individualistic society, a decision should hold only for the person who makes it. In order for the decisions of the Decider to be different, to be valid for an entire society, there must exist something over and above himself which makes his decisions, unlike yours or mine, the decisions of an entire nation. And what is this? Obviously, it is the social vehicles of communication: roads, railroads, airlines, telephones, televisions, newspapers, the Internet, etc. Without these, there would be no society, not even the minimal kind the Decider rules. There would be only a large vacant space with individuals wandering independently around in it. There would be no one to follow the Decider’s decisions, and he would lose his unique position.

The Submitter, too, needs such vehicles. His excluding oneness has placed him in total isolation—but he cannot *remain* totally isolated, for he must extend the imperative of submission, and eventually death, to all humanity. He, too, is in contradiction, and he too must resolve that contradiction by accepting the earthly vehicles of communication. He must use cell phones and make videotapes, and his followers must use cars, trains, and planes in order to get close enough to the enemy to bomb them.

And so we turn to yet a third Hegelian resource: the logic of *Grenze*, of the border zone that separates, yet connects, something and its other—and becomes the basis for both of them.²⁸ Let us call this border zone the “communicative infrastructure” of the planet: the means of transportation and communication. As a *Grenze*, it both connects and separates the Decider and the Submitter. And it is more basic than both of them—for since each must be what the other is not, they can exist only insofar as they are somehow connected; the infrastructure is what connects them.

It is, then, the infrastructure in which the Decider and the Submitter find their “common ground”—one side of our fourth Hegelian resource, the logic of ground in the *Science of Logic*.²⁹ But the other side of that is also present: in this common ground they “go to ground” in the German sense of *zugrunde Gehen*: they perish. For the infrastructure is incompatible with both of them. It is at once the condition of their possibility and their impossibility. They must use it—but they cannot keep it.

Creating and maintaining the world’s communicative infrastructure is an enormous enterprise. It requires social cohesion, reflection, information, and all the other things of which the Decider wants no part at all. Hence, the Decider flies around and calls people up, he goes on television to communicate his decisions to society; but all around him the infrastructure is deteriorating. Roads are rotting, bridges are collapsing, high-speed trains are unknown, the Internet is delivered far more slowly than in other countries and in far fewer places. It all means nothing to the Decider. Entire cities disappear under floodwaters, and the Decider barely notices.

The Submitter has a different problem. It is not that the infrastructure as it relates to him is rotting away beneath his feet, for that would presuppose that he had accepted it in the first place. He cannot do this, because the infrastructure is geared to the use of individuals. This is what distinguishes it from the factories and show projects of the Rational State. Instead of a factory to produce one predetermined kind of good, or a “Palace of the People” to bring the prescribed culture to the masses, the communicative infrastructure is set up for individuals to use as *they* see fit: I can ride on the highway or take the train as I please; I can dial any number I choose on the phone; and so on. The Submitter cannot accept this at all; he rides on animals, lives in caves, and uses the communicative infrastructure only to bring death to others.

In order to appropriate their own ground—in order to appropriate the infrastructure—the Decider and the Submitter would have to be

other than they are: they would have to abandon their basic principles of arbitrary decision and divine submission. Each of them, to resume a quote from Part I, “is not what it ought to be. It contradicts its content, the Idea; it must perish.” Both the Decider and the Submitter are doomed, over the long term, because they cannot be what they are and still accommodate to what they both need. The future thus belongs to their common ground, the infrastructure.

But according to a fifth Hegelian resource, the infrastructure will at some point cease to be an “infra” structure, an undifferentiated and indistinct background formation, and “pass forward into existence”: it must come forward as a distinct entity, a *Sache*, in opposition to what else is there.³⁰ At that point, the infrastructure will show up as a cohesive community of its own—with modern airports, high-speed trains, cell phones, and superconnectivity. If the previous paragraph is correct this cannot come to pass in the United States or in the Middle East as they are now constituted, but there are two obvious candidates: Europe and China.

Consider: an officer worker in Shanghai goes to the bathroom on the eighty-fifth floor of an office tower, flushes the toilet, and washes her hands. The water from the toilet and the water from the sink flow into two different municipal sewage systems, one leading to a purification plant and the other to a water system used for things such as watering lawns and washing cars. For Shanghai has three different sewage systems; no American city has more than two.

Or consider: a lawyer in Paris finishes work at five p.m. and heads for the subway. She lives at the other end of France, in Aix-en-Provence, but she will be home for supper; the subway goes direct to the bullet train, which traverses the country in less than three hours.

Or consider: a businessman in Munich goes to the park to eat his lunch. While eating his sandwich, he downloads some documents, works on them, and e-mails them to his boss in Prague; his computer is wirelessly linked to a satellite.

Such infrastructural developments, except perhaps for the final one, are no more likely in the United States than they are in the mountains of Afghanistan. But they exist today, along with many others like them, in Europe and in China.

Hegel famously said that a *Volk*, a people, appears only once in history. Europe has been there all along, but not as a *Volk*, China, according to Hegel, has been a unified *Volk* as long as there has been a Chinese state; but he might be willing to say that it has changed so much in the last century that it is really not the same *Volk* at all.

But I think he would be even more willing to say that he was wrong; that in the shapes of China and Europe, history, once again, will surprise us all.

Notes

1. Cf. my *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000).

2. Jean-François Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 27–31.

3. Cf. Pierre Hadot, “Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin,” *Entretiens Hardt* V (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960) 107–37.

4. Hegel, letter to Sinclair of early 1813, in Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 4 vols., 1952–1960) II 4 (#218); *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 292.

5. All references, unless otherwise noted, will be to Hegel, *Werke*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 20 vols. 1970–71) XIII 138; English translations will be given after the slash; that of this volume, Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2 vols. with consecutive pagination, 1975), 100.

6. On the impotence of nature cf. Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 109n, 112–15.

7. *Werke* XII, 35/ Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett 1988), 24.

8. Hegel, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Hrsg. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1940), 126/ Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T. M. Knox and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 94.

9. Cf. *Werke* XII, 81–85/60–65; translation altered.

10. On the revisability of Hegel's System, see my *The Company of Words: Hegel, Language, and Systematic Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 127f, 165f, 177f.

11. McCumber, *The Company of Words*, 15–18.

12. *Werke* II, 413f/ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 172. Reinhard Lauth argues that Hegel is wrong to claim that Fichte conflates the two levels; indeed, Fichte himself denied this doubleness, claiming that his *Wissenschaftslehre* never claimed that the ego as found and perceived was its principle: the principle of Fichte's philosophy was instead the ego as a free, a priori construction. But Hegel's deeper point remains: even a “pure” ego, if used as the sort of principle that Fichte uses it as, must be at once plenary and

defective. Reinhard Lauth, *Hegel vor der Wissenschaftslehre* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1987), 146f.

13. Hegel, *Werke* II 81; Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 144.

14. *Werke* II, 426f/184.

15. *Ibid.*, 87/148f.

16. *Ibid.*, 426f/184.

17. *Ibid.*, 89f/151.

18. *Ibid.*, 187/148.

19. Cf. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); the racism and sexism of Bloom's account of higher education should not blind us to its merits.

20. Isaiah Berlin, "On the Pursuit of the Ideal," *New York Review of Books*, March 17, 1988, 11.

21. For a discussion of minimal negation see my *The Company of Words*, 161–62.

22. In the words of Soviet Americanologist Georgi Arbatov: "We are going to deprive you of an enemy." *Time*, May 23, 1988.

23. *Werke* III, 163–78/Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

24. *Werke* V, 190–92/Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1976), 170–72.

25. *Werke* III, 75/52.

26. *Werke* XIX, 331; Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 3 vol. 1974) II, 307; translation altered.

27. Cf. my "Just in Time: Towards a New American Philosophy," *Continental Philosophy Review* 1, no. 34 (2003): 61–80.

28. *Werke* V, 131–39/122–29.

29. *Werke* VI, 82–113/444–69.

30. *Werke*, 119–23/474–78.

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PART II

History, Geography, and Race

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Is Hegel's Philosophy of History Eurocentric?

Andrew Buchwalter

Of the many criticisms leveled against Hegel, one of the most persistent and least contested concerns his purported Eurocentrism.¹ This criticism is directed with special force at his theory of history. Not only does Hegel's philosophy of world history have as its principal subject matter events and developments largely specific to European social, political, cultural, and religious traditions. World history itself is presented as a teleological process culminating in an affirmation and even apotheosis of European or, as Hegel says, Christian-Germanic societies. True, Hegel does include in his account of world history the cultures of non-Western societies. He is said to do so, however, not because he is committed to a genuinely inclusive account of world history but only because such cultures are viewed as germinally possessing traits that find realized expression in the cultures of modern Western societies. In the words of one critic: Hegel "goes so far as to think of every culture as a means in the furtherance of the ultimate goal that, of course, is, for Hegel, the European-Christian culture."²

In what follows, I shall not dispute the presence of a centrally Western or even Eurocentric focus to Hegel's conception of history. Nor do I deny that his writings on history may exhibit a certain Eurochauvinism and what has been called "a certain prejudice against non-European cultures."³ What I do challenge is the assumption that Hegel's idea or "logic" of world history is itself Eurocentric, at least in the pejorative sense commonly associated with that term. My argument revolves around the following six theses: (1) while Hegel does fashion a developmental account of world history, he does so not through an

objectivist depiction of actual historical phenomena but through a normative reconstruction that challenges such depictions, including those that might assign special status to the empirical development of the West; (2) while Hegel's account of history does make systematic reference to existing empirical realities, it does so not because it abandons a normative focus but because normative reconstruction itself takes the form of reality's self-reconstruction; (3) while Hegel's account of history does assign priority to Western cultural and political arrangements, it does so in a way that also challenges one-sided views of European modernity, while also fostering an openness to other cultures; (4) while Hegel's approach to history articulates a singular logic of development, that logic not only accommodates but even requires plurality in accounts of history itself; (5) Hegel's normative account of history includes a moral-practical dimension designed to cultivate in his contemporaries commitment to the practical realization of freedom in the world; and (6) appreciation of the moral-practical component of Hegel's account of history supports not only alternate accounts of historical development but a form of civic engagement committed to interculturalism and to a notion of globality more inclusive than that associated with Eurocentric positions.

Thesis 1

Conventional understandings notwithstanding, Hegel's philosophy of history proffers no objectivist assertions about the empirical course of historical events. It does not make philosophical claims about existing historical phenomena, depict law-like regularities in the historical process, or trace indwelling patterns of development. None of these efforts, central though each may be to traditional theorizing about history, are features of Hegel's "philosophical history of the world."⁴ Indeed, to the extent that Hegel does express himself on the actual course of historical events, he does so reluctantly⁵ and with skepticism. Far from exhibiting any overarching unity or purpose, history as conventionally apprehended is more accurately characterized as the haphazard and pointless succession of individual cultures. Hegel, of course, does advance a developmental account of world history, yet he does so not in depicting some preexisting order of things but in *rationaly reconstructing* empirically received phenomena.⁶ While proceeding from data obtained historiographically (we "take history as it is"),⁷ a philosophical account of world history nonetheless restates what might otherwise seem without meaning so that it may be construed as a process expressing

as a developmental purpose. Adverting to the "simple idea of reason," the philosophical approach refashions empirical phenomena so as to vindicate the supposition "that reason governs the world, and that world history is therefore a rational process."⁸ As he also writes, if not unambiguously: "Whoever looks at the world rationally will find that it in turn assumes a rational aspect."⁹

That Hegel's philosophy of history may take the form of a philosophical reconstruction is certainly no evidence that it is not also an account of a logic inherent in existing historical phenomena. Thinkers such as Marx¹⁰ and Habermas¹¹ have employed reconstructive tools just to expose an underlying logic inaccessible to conventional analysis. For Hegel, however, rational reconstruction has a different function. In keeping with his idealist ontology, reconstruction serves to constitute reality itself. Consonant with the general method of the *Realphilosophie*, its task is to rework what is obtained empirically (*Dasein*) in terms of conceptual categories (*Begriffe*), and thereby generate the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of objects themselves. Rational reconstruction operates not by revealing an order beneath the welter of historical phenomena, but by constituting world history in its genuine nature or "true being." Philosophical history, Hegel writes, is at once the narrative account of history and history itself, the *res gestas* and the *rerum gestarum*. The "object" of *philosophical* world history is "not general reflections about history . . . but world history itself."¹²

For many it is precisely this idealism that reveals the problematic nature of Hegel's account of history. Apart from exemplifying the speculative hypostatizations first ridiculed by left-Hegelians, it appears to bolster the view that Hegelian historiography is part of a self-serving metaphysics employed to fashion modern European or "Christian-Germanic" culture as the triumphant culmination of global development. Yet again this view misconstrues Hegel's position. Though the philosophy of history, like the *Realphilosophie* in general, is part of a reconstructive ontology, that ontology has a decidedly evaluative function. Indeed, it can be called a "normative ontology,"¹³ an account of reality that is critical while also devoid of the abstract moralizing anathema to Hegel. Hegel himself speaks of its "transfigurative" nature: "Philosophy . . . transfigures reality, which appears to be unjust, into the rational, showing it as something . . . with which reason can be satisfied."¹⁴ The task of a reconstructive ontology of history is not to present a purified endorsement of existing conditions but to proffer a transfigured account committed to demonstrating concretely what is deficient in existing reality and how the latter might appear when purged of its adventitious attributes.

Thesis 2

To be sure, Hegel does not fashion philosophical history as a normative ideal abstractly juxtaposed to the empirical course of events. Any such juxtaposition of reason and reality is alien to a thinker whose central aim is to surmount just such oppositions. It is also foreign to the idea of philosophical historiography itself. While Hegel does claim that the philosophical historian proceeds from the assumption that history is rational, this assumption is merely a “hypothesis” or “presupposition” that must be elaborated in explicating the subject matter itself. If the philosophical historian proceeds from the “simple idea” that reason rules the world, this is an idea whose “proof is to be found in the study of world history itself.”¹⁵

Still, the fact that philosophical world history is intertwined with the actual course of events does not detract from its reconstructive or “transfigurative” character. On the contrary, in linking the validity of his account to a historical process, Hegel only underscores the reconstructive nature of the undertaking. What characterizes a philosophical study of world history is precisely the process by which historical reality subjects *itself* to normative reconstruction. If Hegel’s normative ontology seeks to establish the “true being” of an entity, that is achieved not simply in conjoining existence and concept but—in line with his equation of truth with spirit—in the process by which an existing substance becomes subject for itself. The point is central to Hegel’s account of philosophical history as a history of the realization of freedom—“the progress in the consciousness of freedom.”¹⁶

Hegel’s determination to construe philosophical history as a history of freedom flows from his intention to view history rationally, for reason here connotes just that which is self-determining, that is, that able to account for its own foundations. Accordingly, the task of a normative account of world history is to assess empirical history from the standpoint of the degree to which it realizes the principle of freedom. This means that a rational approach to history regards received developments from the perspective of their capacity to contribute to a societal order ideally characterized by, *inter alia*, commitment to individual rights and liberties; republican political institutions; and a citizenry that reflexively identifies with its political institutions and exhibits the civic virtue needed to sustain them.¹⁷ At the same time, however, a history of freedom cannot be understood merely as a normative undertaking, a philosophical statement of what might count as such a history. If nothing else, this approach contravenes the idea of freedom itself. Understood as selfhood

in otherness, freedom, for Hegel, cannot abide dichotomy, be it between thought and being, subject and object, or reason and reality. To assert the claims of freedom against received historical phenomena is also to explicate the conditions for their realization in externally existent reality. Yet a history of the concrete realization of freedom itself cannot be presented as a mere *theoretical* construct; it cannot be a third-person account that has reality just for an external observer, one valid only "in itself." If a history of freedom is validated in reality itself, it must attain reality for the agents that comprise social historical reality. It must demonstrate how what is free "in itself" or "for us" can also be so regarded on a first-person basis as well, that is, for the subject matter itself. In short, freedom is realized only to the degree individuals know and understand themselves as free. On Hegel's view of freedom, however, individuals know themselves as free only to the degree that they can find and identify themselves in the external circumstances that condition their existence. In an account of history, such knowledge is achieved as individuals shape and reshape institutions and other circumstances of their shared existence to accommodate their self-conceptions, just as self-conceptions are reshaped to accommodate external realities. In this sense, history qua history of freedom is a process of self-reconstruction, one in which the process by the matter or substance of history reshapes itself in accord with the principle of freedom.

Thus, while Hegel does regard philosophical history as a normative undertaking, it is not one in which norms not abstractly contraposed to the domain of empirical reality. Such an approach would be at variance with the idea of a history of freedom itself, which, focused on the unity of concept and existence, must chart the concrete development and realization of freedom in empirical reality itself. Yet the fact that history takes an empirical dimension, the fact that it must take the form of a "phenomenological" account of freedom's realization, is not also to say that it is not a reconstructive undertaking.¹⁸ Hegel's point, rather, is that a phenomenological account of the history of freedom, focused as it is on the progress in the self-consciousness of freedom, is also one in which the empirical reality subject restates and further shapes itself from the perspective of freedom and rationality. Here in particular, the phenomenal course of history is one with its conceptual narration. Hegel may abandon an abstractly normative approach to history for one charting freedom's actual self-development, not, however, because he rejects normative reconstruction but because a concrete history of freedom requires that reality subject itself to normative reconstruction.

Thesis 3

Critics of Hegel will likely find little compelling in these observations. Even if his history remained a reconstructive undertaking, this would presumably count for little if reconstruction itself served to champion European cultural and political arrangements. Indeed, philosophical history presented as normative reconstruction may be even more objectionable than its descriptive-explanatory counterparts. It is one thing to make assertions about world history based on contestable empirical claims about the preeminence of Western practices and institutions. It is another to advance an account of history that recasts empirical reality in a way that presents Western culture as the very culmination of world history, one that serves as a normative standard against which others are judged and to which they are expected aspire.

In fact, Hegel's philosophical history does ascribe a certain priority to European cultural and political arrangements. It does so, moreover, not just as a part of philosophy that, understood as its own time apprehended in thought, attends first and foremost to the parameters of its own cultural circumstances. Hegel also ascribes *normative* significance to Europe, European modernity especially, which for him instantiates the highest expression of the human spirit—the notion of freedom understood as *bei sich Selbst sein*. The account is of course familiar. The concept of freedom emerged politically with the Greek city state and culturally with Christianity. It found generally realized cultural expression with modern Christianity, Protestantism in particular. And it found political realization with modern constitutional polities, committed equally to the right of subjective freedom, political autonomy, republican liberty, and the general idea that political institutions must conform to standards of rational justification. Nor is the European contribution to the realization of freedom just a moral-political matter. The idea of rational justification itself—the autonomy of reason—is just the theoretical expression of a notion of freedom whose articulation is of Western provenance. For Hegel, European modernity certified a notion of rational legitimacy according to which what heretofore may have been validated through tradition, custom, and other received considerations is now to be justified by rational argument alone. “It is a great obstinacy, the kind of obstinacy which does honor to human beings, that they are unwilling to acknowledge in their attitudes anything which has not been justified by thought—and this obstinacy is the characteristic property of the modern age.”¹⁹

Certainly Hegel does not claim that the notion of autonomy has application only to Western or modern European societies. He asserts

that this principle, together with that of autonomous self-reflexivity, possesses universal standing and denotes features implicit in all cultures. Rational autonomy is a concept that is "inherent in the essence of every man."²⁰ He makes this point even when detailing the ethnic and racial differences of peoples: "Man is implicitly rational; herein lies the possibility of equal justice for all men and the futility of a rigid distinction between races."²¹ Appreciation of this point is important given current tendencies to construe Hegel's cultural philosophy in racial and even racist terms.²² It is also important as it demonstrates the universal extension of his conceptions of freedom and reason.

Still, whatever generally Hegel may say about the universal nature of these concepts, he maintains that their realization is specific to the Western experience. For one thing, he claims that the idea of freedom first "came into the world"²³ with the revealed religion of Christianity, whose notion of the interpenetration of finite and infinite established "the self-sufficient and inherently infinite personality of the individual, the principle of subjective freedom."²⁴ In addition, freedom proper—"the self-consciousness of freedom"²⁵—is something specific to European modernity. Not only does modern Western culture formally institutionalize legal and political structures based on the principle of freedom; with its differentiated accounts of thought and being, subject and other, self and other, it also furnishes the bifurcations required for the form of self-objectification needed for any explicit self-consciousness of freedom.²⁶ Moreover, modern developments fashion a social world in which consciousness of freedom becomes the defining principle of social life itself. Cultural consciousness of the "intrinsic value of subjectivity"²⁷ itself becomes the "form of the world" itself, shaping all aspects of human life, from the legal, moral, economic, and political to the aesthetic, emotional, and religious as well.²⁸ All are respects in which, for Hegel, "[t]he greatness of our age consists in the fact that freedom, the distinctive feature of spirit whereby it is at home with itself, is *recognized*."²⁹

Yet if Hegel does assign normative pride of place to Western notions of freedom and rationality, his account of history, precisely in its normative character, also questions contemporary articulations of these notions. He would challenge the type of narrow, self-satisfied understandings of European modernity evident in thinkers as diverse as Fukuyama³⁰ and Rorty.³¹ This follows from the general structure of his philosophy of freedom, whose distinction between existentially realized freedom, "Objective Spirit," and fully self-apprehending freedom, "Absolute Spirit," bars ratifying any historically existent state of affairs as freedom's full realization. More importantly, the principle of social-political freedom

infusing world history is not fully represented in modern societies, however much they might idealize the latter. Indeed, measured against the “self-consciousness of freedom,”³² modern life is easily characterized by deficiencies in concretizing freedom, as the economic and administrative imperatives of modern societies undermine the very notions of freedom they purport to defend. Finally, Hegel’s own articulation of what counts as realized freedom is at variance with its conventional modern manifestations. Liberty for him is intertwined with concepts of mutuality, social membership, and communal virtue—concepts more akin to Asian and African accounts than Western counterparts.³³

True, unlike some critics of Western modernity, Hegel’s critique and his proposed alternatives remain within the ambit of Western reason itself. They are advanced not as radical dismissals but as internal criticisms, committed to realizing more fully the claims of Western reason itself. Not only is his communitarianism presented as an immanent development of modern notions of freedom and liberty; its proper articulation itself depends on incorporating those notions. Yet this does not undermine Hegel’s challenge to one-sided notions of Western conceptions of autonomy. In his view the only proper challenge is one that confronts an object with its own claims. Thus, a rational reconstruction of modern notions of liberty—as his transition from civil society to political community demonstrates—must take the form of a societal self-reconstruction on the part of individuals defined by those liberties.

Hegel’s criticism of a narrow understanding of modern freedom also flows from his particular understanding of the autonomous character of modern societies. In keeping with his definition of spirit, Hegel claims that what characterizes a free society is not just that it accommodates institutions that underwrite individual and collective liberty but that a people also understands itself as free. This means, *inter alia*, that a people can claim autonomy—it can claim the status of a *Volksgeist*—only to the degree that it routinely reassesses the relationship between norms, practices, and institutions that shapes and defines its identity. Only through such regular self-reimaging can a people hope to remain the source of conditions defining it. Yet such self-reflection is never complete. Because the self, be it of an individual or a culture, can never fully grasp itself, *qua* subject, in the act of self-comprehension, every such act is necessarily partial and one-sided. Likewise, every act of self-comprehension, in seeking to be authoritative, is compelled to repeat the process, continually seeking anew the closure its nature nonetheless denies. And to the degree that it is repeated, every new act of self-comprehension propels the self beyond itself, to a different and presumably more encompassing, if no less unstable, articulation of its identity. Any affirmation

of autonomous identity is inevitably an assertion of nonidentity and self-transcendence. Hegel makes the point with regard to the experience of the individual consciousness, ever condemned to "suffer . . . violence at its own hands."³⁴ But it is also applicable to accounts of cultural and societal identity. Referring to the historical succession of *Volksgeistern*, Hegel writes: "The history of spirit is its own deed; for spirit is only what it does, and its deed is to make itself . . . the object of its own consciousness, and to comprehend itself in its interpretation of itself to itself. This comprehension is its being and principle, and the completion of an act is at the same time its alienation and transition."³⁵

Thus, while Hegel claims that European modernity represents the world historical realization of the principle of freedom, that principle, far from endorsing as definitive the structures of European modernity, only attests to the need for their self-transcendence. The autonomous realization of a culture or an epoch itself is fulfilled "by effectuating a transition to . . . a new phase and a new spirit."³⁶ Any culture, including that represented by Europe, sustains itself only in surpassing itself.³⁷

It may be objected that while Hegel does ascribe a dynamic and self-transcending dimension to European culture, he does so not in the spirit of, say, cross-cultural understanding and global openness but to undergird Europe's imperialist and expansionist tendencies. Modern notions of freedom, identified by Hegel with the *European spirit* itself, are predicated on an appropriative attitude to the other. The "infinite drive for knowledge" that infuses reason's claim to autonomy is not satisfied until all that is alien can be deemed its own determination. "The principle of the European spirit is . . . self-conscious reason which is confident that for it there can be no insuperable barrier and which therefore takes an interest in everything in order to become present to itself therein."³⁸

Even here, however, Hegel is no crude apologist for Western expansionism. His commitment to the universal reach of freedom should not be construed as support for a Napoleonic *mission civilisatrice* gone global. Instead, the infinite drive characteristic of modern principles of freedom and rationality is not only constrained by but fulfilled in recognition of the autonomy of the other. The self may seek to find itself in the other, but that self-location is itself possible only to degree that it not only recognizes the other but obtains the other's recognition. He makes the point with regard to European colonialism, claiming that the "liberation of colonies itself proves to be of the greatest advantage to the mother state, just as the emancipation of the slaves is of greatest advantage to the master."³⁹ He says the same of the European spirit itself, which "opposes the world to itself, makes itself free of it, but

in turn annuls this opposition, takes its other, the manifold, back into itself, in its unitary nature.”⁴⁰ At least in principle, the European spirit is a principle not of domination but mutuality.⁴¹ What Hegel says of the individual self is applicable to the relationship of communities as well: “[T]he concrete return of me into me in externality is that I, the infinite self-relation, . . . have the existence of my personality in the being of other persons, in my relation to them, and in my recognition by them, which is thus mutual.”⁴²

Those critical of the Eurocentric character of Hegel’s philosophy of history may focus less, however, on cross-cultural dialogue than on his account of the relationship of earlier stages of development to history’s presumed final culmination in “Christian-Germanic” societies. It is here that Hegel appears to assert that such cultures have value, not in themselves, but only as a means to the realize a modern social order. Yet this view also misrepresents the very idea of a developmental account of freedom. A history of freedom cannot regard individual cultures as mere tools needed to realize a final end. At least as regards those features of a culture distinctly expressive of the principle of spirit—Hegel names “morality, ethics, and religiosity”—these have an “infinite right” and must be assigned intrinsic value.⁴³ Central to a history of freedom is the proposition that earlier cultures must be valorized as autonomous, as ends in themselves rather than mere stepping stones for the realization of a later stage.⁴⁴

To be sure, this is not to suggest that Hegel seeks to champion the irreducible and self-sufficient uniqueness of an earlier culture. As already suggested, cultural identity, for Hegel, is not a wholly indigenous property but one achieved only through reference to other cultures, to those—future cultures included—alien to itself. Moreover, cultural identity itself depends on the availability of institutional structures allowing for genuinely collective processes of self-interpretation and self-definition—and these for Hegel are most fully developed in modern constitutional societies. Yet if in this sense Hegel does ascribe historical superiority to modern societies, he does so not to denigrate the claims of earlier cultures but to accommodate their realization. Hegel’s critics are not wrong to assert that on his view an earlier culture can serve as a means to realize a social order understood as the endpoint of history. But it is also the case that a higher stage itself serves as a means to actualize more fully a principle of identity associated with earlier culture.⁴⁵ In this regard, “the relation of a mere means to an end disappears.”⁴⁶

In the same way that Hegel claims that the past cannot be tossed aside in the march of history, he also claims that the historical present depends for its own reality on recourse to the past. Directed to the

self-consciousness of freedom, philosophical history culminates not just in the realization of free institutions but in the self-awareness of individuals as free. Self-conscious freedom, however, cannot take the form of an internal state or a mere subjective phenomenon. Rooted in the idea of selfhood in otherness, freedom requires that individuals recognize themselves in the objective conditions of their existence. This means, *inter alia*, that self-conscious freedom is also the *historical* consciousness of freedom. Autonomous self-consciousness involves the process by which a people locates itself with regard to the historical traditions that always already shape it,⁴⁷ affirming its debt to a historical legacy even as it refashions that legacy so as to claim a distinctive identity of its own. For Hegel, cultural self-definition is a process of internalization (*Er-innenerung*), an appropriation of a received heritage that simultaneously recalls the heritage itself.⁴⁸ Without historical reference, the present is an incomplete abstraction; it “cannot understand itself and develop an integrated consciousness without reference to the past.”⁴⁹

Thesis 4

Even if one acknowledges that Hegel's is a nuanced account of world history that eschews any apotheosis of modern European culture, his view as a whole may be said to articulate a singular and even unilinear structure that would seem to preclude alternative accounts, especially those that may lie outside the Western cultural context. And indeed his theory does give expression to a specific inner logic of historical development. Yet to say that world history is governed by a developmental logic is not also to say that history itself is incapable of assuming alternate forms and iterations. On the contrary, openness to diversity is not only accommodated but even mandated by his view. This point can be appreciated by noting the degree to which developmental world history is for Hegel a *history of spirit*.

Hegel's history of spirit is conventionally construed in theological terms.⁵⁰ On his view, though, such a history instantiates first and foremost the principle of self-reflexive subjectivity that informs spirit in all its manifestations. For a reconstructive account of history, this principle is significant in multiple respects. It defines history's subject matter (political communities), historical dynamism (surmounting self-reflexive incompleteness), historical development (simultaneous negation and preservation of one cultural principle in another), and history's very purpose (deepening human self-comprehension). But subjectivity is also important as it accommodates contingency and diversity in an account

of historical development. As the articulation of self-reflexive subjectivity, spirit affirms the principle of *bei sich Selbst sein*. Yet this principle requires that spirit find expression in what is other and alien to itself—in the circumstances that envelop any account of historical experience. As a history of spirit, a “universal” account of historical development must also affirm particularity and contingency. In this regard, Hegel, displaying affinities to Montesquieu, asserts that historical development has meaning and reality only with reference to specific climatic, geographical, anthropological, and cultural conditions, among others. Indeed, he defines history itself as just the shape of spirit assumes in the form of particular events and occurrences: “*die Geschichte [ist] die Gestaltung des Geistes in Form des Geschehens*.”⁵¹ And because contingent circumstances are endlessly variable, so too—here Hegel displays affinities to Herder—are the accounts of historical development and the specific shapes of spirit expressed through them. “Since history is the process whereby spirit assumes the shape of events and is of immediate natural reality, the stages of its development are present as immediate natural principles, constituting a plurality of separate entities.”⁵²

To be sure, as a history of spirit world history remains first and foremost a history of freedom rather than nature; at issue is self-determination, not external determination. Indeed, proper to a history of freedom is just the purgation of the forms of heteronomous determination associated with empirical contingency. Even here, however, world history on Hegel’s account affirms circumstantial contingency. Qua selfhood in otherness, freedom can never be articulated abstractly, in juxtaposition to forms of external determination. Rather—and here Hegel opposes Kant and Fichte—it can express self-determination, it can defuse external conditioning, only when it can be said to affirm itself in the circumstances that might otherwise constrain it. Here, too, freedom is unintelligible as a mere concept, but requires realization in external reality as well. In addition, attention to contingency inheres in the very idea of a history of the consciousness of freedom. A people is self-consciously free—again in line with the notion of freedom as *bei sich Selbst sein*—only to the degree that individuals apprehend themselves in the circumstances specific to the conditions of their existence. Here, too, freedom is relative to the conditions surrounding its expression. And since these circumstances are endlessly varied, a philosophical world history “mediated by consciousness and will”⁵³ will also assume varied forms relative to the diverse conditions of its expression.

Hegel’s point, though, is not just that an already clarified and validated principle of development assumes different manifestations according to changing contextual circumstances. It is also that the embodiment

process defines and often generates the principles themselves. Such is certainly the case with the concept of freedom. World history is the history of the consciousness of freedom, but what freedom is is itself defined and redefined according to conditions relative to particular circumstances. The process by which the concept of freedom is historically realized is also one in which "the concept itself . . . is modified."⁵⁴ Moreover, since a history of the consciousness of freedom advances to the degree that one culture appropriates, reworks, and transfigures a received legacy, the process of development is itself intertwined with the specific circumstances defining the reality and self-understanding of a particular culture. World history, for Hegel, may remain a singular and even unilinear history of spirit, but that process is not thereby contraposed to the particularity and variety of empirical reality. Rather, developmental world history itself incorporates difference, instantiating "the differentiation of . . . spirit within itself."⁵⁵

In recent years much discussion has been devoted to the concept of "alternative modernities."⁵⁶ To the extent that this discussion thematizes diverse types of modernity,⁵⁷ Hegel would be an unlikely proponent. For him modernity—and his theory of history is also an account of modernity—expresses a uniform logic, depicting development of a concept of spirit whose structures derives from his logic and metaphysics. But Hegel does not thereby claim that a developmental account of modernity cannot assume multiple forms and expressions. Multiple accounts flow from appreciation of how history—tellingly fashioned as world rather than universal history—requires empirical diversity for its concrete articulation. Hegel himself advances a conception of history that forefronts European considerations. And a Eurocentric bias may attach to any account rooted in notions of freedom, spirit, and subjectivity as derived from the Western philosophical tradition. Still, appreciation of the nuanced nature of his account of history reveals an openness to alternative accounts, including those that supplement his own Western orientation.

Thesis 5

I have argued that Hegel's philosophy of history, far from serving as a positivistic apotheosis of the existing realities of Europe and European modernity, is advanced rather as part of a normative reconstruction, one that, while acknowledging the achievements of the West, also represents a challenge to any narrow understanding of those achievements. This point can be further developed, however, by regarding the philosophy of history as much as a normative-practical as a normative-theoretical under-

taking. As does the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel's *Philosophy of History* has a pedagogical dimension. This is so not just because it was prepared as lectures for university students, but because, like the practical philosophy of which it is a part, it was intended to "cultivate and shape the civic disposition"⁵⁸ of members of his audience. Directed to students who, given the then current nature of German society and the German university system, were expected to assume positions of leadership in society, the philosophy of history was conceived in part as an effort in civic education designed to exhort the public engagement needed to further realize the principle of freedom whose evolution is normatively sketched in the account of history. In publicly challenging "the cultural prejudices of the age"⁵⁹—e.g., apolitical notions of Protestant liberty, egoist views of individual freedom, bureaucratic notions of legal authority, institutionalist conceptions of law, traditionalist conceptions of community, and, not least, exclusionary notions of national sovereignty—Hegel sought to inculcate in his audience appreciation of the desirability of further realizing a notion of freedom understood as selfhood in otherness, thereby encouraging individuals to participate in the efforts required to promote that realization.⁶⁰ Concluding one set of lectures, he states: "It is my desire that this history . . . should contain for you a summons to grasp the spirit of the time, which is present in us by nature, and—each in his own place—consciously to bring it from its natural condition, i.e., from its lifeless seclusion, into the light of day."⁶¹ Not unlike Kant's philosophy of history,⁶² also a history of freedom, Hegel's is as much practical as theoretical philosophy and remains dependent on the moral cultivation of its addressees for its reality and final validity. In practical as well as theoretical terms, a history of the self-consciousness of freedom assumes objectivity in its normative reconstruction.

The point may be made more concrete by briefly considering Hegel's account of civil servants, the chief players in his treatment of executive power. The corps of civil servants, "the most conspicuously educated class,"⁶³ possesses a special relation to university education. First, education provides training (*Erziehung*) in the competencies needed to administer the complex systems of modern societies. In addition, university education trains individuals for administrative positions, qualifications for which are established through uniform and objectively demonstrable skills and abilities rather than, as had traditionally been the case, through group membership, family ties, patronage, or personal connections. Perhaps most significantly, education furnishes the moral cultivation (*Bildung*) required of modern civil servants.⁶⁴ Education inculcates sensitivity to the universal considerations required of individuals expected to exhibit a "public consciousness."⁶⁵ This "universalizing education"⁶⁶ cultivates in

individuals the impartiality and selflessness needed for genuinely public servants of the state, individuals who are neither public employees nor political operatives but agents of the common good. Moreover, moral and intellectual cultivation fosters an appreciation of the commonality of interests and diversity of perspectives that must be the focus of administrators in the large, complex, and differentiated societies of modernity. Finally, *Bildung* cultivates the complex judgment required of public officials whose task, as members of what Hegel calls "the middle class" (*Mittelstand*), is to mediate universal and particular. On the one hand, moral cultivation equips administrators with an ability to relate laws and politics to particular circumstances. On the other, it cultivates an ability on the part of career civil servants—termed by Hegel "the educated intelligence and the legal consciousness of the mass of the people"⁶⁷—to bring the concerns of everyday social life to the attention of policymakers. In both respects moral education enables "the intellectual estate"⁶⁸ to perform its function as the mediating class in public life.

Hegel assumes that the functions of the class of civil servants are exercised principally in the domestic sphere. But anticipating the work of the late Kojève,⁶⁹ he also assigns the intellectual estate a global and even world historical function. As products of universities committed as much to self-cultivation as career training, the future civil servants are viewed both as addressees and agents for the "universal knowledge and universal perspectives" comprising the material of a cultural world spirit. Also, as agents of political systems whose identity is itself linked to relations of reciprocal recognition with other states,⁷⁰ civil servants in one community interact with counterparts elsewhere,⁷¹ and in a way that can contribute to a shared global culture. Similarly, in their expectation to mediate universal and particular, one that also concretizes the situated cosmopolitanism introduced by Hegel at the beginning of his account of the Administration of Justice, civil servants can effectuate the *Weltgeist* itself, understood by Hegel as reposing in just the mediation of "restricted" and "unrestricted" perspectives on the human spirit.⁷² It is not coincidental that one version of the *Philosophy of Right* concludes the section on world history with a robust endorsement of this "middle class."⁷³

It is easy to ridicule Hegel's confidence in the intelligence, impartiality, and moral judgment of the class of civil servants. Karl Marx is well known for the scorn he heaped on what for him was an ideological view of state bureaucracy.⁷⁴ For present purposes, however, it is enough to note the role played by moral-practical considerations in Hegel's account of world history. World history does not proceed objectivistically, behind the backs of human agents, but is dependent in part on practical

engagement, itself nurtured through moral and theoretical cultivation. Hegel may be famous for claiming that philosophy does not *directly* instruct the world; he does claim that education can and should shape the consciousness of individuals who later can contribute to reason's realization in the world.

Thesis 6

Two points follow from this account of the role of moral cultivation in the realization of world history, and both involve a commitment to global openness. First, it further questions the notion that Hegel advances a monolithic, singular, or exclusionary conception of world history. To say that philosophizing about history has a normative-practical function aimed at the knowledge and action capacities of contemporary agents means that world history is fashioned from a particular perspective. Like philosophy generally ("its own time apprehended in thought"), the philosophy of history is directed to the "present standpoint,"⁷⁵ addressing individuals, including lecture attendees, from the perspective of "their time and their world."⁷⁶ But if philosophical world history does have this perspectival dimension, then it allows, precisely in its character as *world* history, for other accounts of development, those written at different times and directed to different audiences. Hegel may do little to detail such accounts;⁷⁷ and his own has an undeniably European dimension. There is little in his thought explicitly directed to "provincializing Europe," the expression proffered by Dipesh Chakrabarty to relativize Eurocentric approaches.⁷⁸ Still, understanding Hegel's philosophy of world history as a type of normative reconstruction conceived with practical intent permits ascribing to it an openness not only to diverse accounts of history, but to what Charles Taylor, invoking Chakrabarty, calls a "multiform world" of historical development.⁷⁹

Second, to say that world history for Hegel is a normative-practical undertaking directed to the conditions of agency on the part of his contemporaries also suggests that the latter can be expected to display sensitivity to other cultures, one that may facilitate realization of a global culture and even the idea of globality itself. To expect compatriots to play a role in the worldly realization of freedom means that they must contribute to the reality not just of free institutions but of an ethico-political community conscious of itself as free.⁸⁰ However, a realized form of self-conscious freedom cannot be circumscribed by the boundaries of a particular political community.⁸¹ As we know from Hegel's

epistemology and social ontology, both of which rest on accounts of intersubjectivity, affirmation of the autonomous self-consciousness of one being (be it an individual or a group) is unintelligible without recognition of the self-consciousness of another. For Hegel this means at least three things as regards an autonomous political community: it must recognize the culture of another, it must acknowledge the other's understanding of itself, and it must incorporate into its own self-understanding the other's recognitive understanding of it. What Hegel said of the historical emergence of German identity applies generally as well: cultural-political autonomy requires attention to "alien forms of life and the bringing of these to bear upon [one's] own."⁸² Moreover, since the recognition that one culture obtains from another is enriching and meaningful only if freely given, the autonomous self-identity of one culture depends on its affirming the autonomy of the other. Thus, while the historical realization of freedom may depend on citizens committed to realizing freedom in one community, such realization itself not only involves but demands a broader *Weltweisheit*⁸³—an openness to other cultures, their sense of self-identity included.

Appreciation of the intersubjective dimension of cultural identity formation is also important as it indicates how historical agents may contribute to the realization of a global culture, a shared global identity included. As noted, individual self-identity depends *a limine* on a recognitive process in which the self is prepared to incorporate into its own self-understanding the other's perspective on its identity. Yet the first self will most openly recognize the other's recognition of it only if knows that the other is in turn prepared to recognize that its own identity itself depends on recognizing that of the first. This means that the other must also be prepared to incorporate into its sense of self the first self's understanding of it. In this respect individual identity formation is intertwined with a process of *mutual* recognition, one involving a dynamic of reciprocal adjustment and adaptation tendentially contributing not only to a convergence of perspectives but formation of a common identity. What Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* said of persons applies to peoples as well: in reciprocal recognition the I becomes a We. In this respect, freedom properly realized in one community is intertwined not only with the freedom of another community but *a limine* with formation of a global culture and a shared sense of global identity—a *Weltgeist*, as it were. Hegel himself spoke only of the emergent cultural identity of European peoples,⁸⁴ but his argument applies as well to the world's peoples.

To be sure, a Hegelian notion of global commonality has little in common with the "philanthropic" humanism of Kantian cosmopolitanism.⁸⁵

For Hegel, historically realized freedom remains tied to the realities of a particular political community. Moreover, any global culture is itself formed and sustained only in the ongoing interaction of its individual communities. For Hegel, there are no global norms outside the law of peoples itself. The world's court of judgment is indeed world history itself.⁸⁶ Yet far from denying a "cosmopolitan" dimension to Hegel's notion of historical agency, this insight only affirms it. Because Hegel does assert the codependency of global and national culture, *Weltgeist* and *Volksgeist*,⁸⁷ realization of freedom in one community proceeds isomorphically with cultivation of an intercultural sensibility and a commitment to globality itself.

It is true that Hegel himself does not fully develop the position adumbrated here. And his university lectures certainly include comments reflecting more ethnocentric dispositions. Still, proper acknowledgment of what Hegel did say, combined with an appreciation both of his general view of the relationship of self and other and his own advocacy of a contemporizing approach to philosophical historiography,⁸⁸ argues for a treatment of his position that in this instance too, goes beyond the parochialism commonly associated with it. Hegel does exhort his listeners to contribute to the realization of freedom in the world. Since worldly freedom consists in the self-consciousness of freedom, such exhortation must include not only an openness to other cultures but a commitment to a (properly differentiated) notion of globality itself. Hegel's philosophical world history articulates the rudiment of a notion of global citizenship, rooted in *Weltweisheit* and contributive to the *Weltgeist* itself.

In this chapter I have questioned the charge of Eurocentrism typically leveled at Hegel's philosophy of history. While not disputing the presence of such a dimension, I have argued that it is less pernicious than commonly assumed. Hegel's history does culminate in affirmation of European cultural-political accomplishments, but this affirmation is advanced less as a triumphalist presentation of actual historical developments than as a reconstructive account of historical phenomena ultimately meant to engage the moral consciousness and conditions of agency of a German and European public. In this respect Hegel not only allows for alternative accounts of history but expects from his fellow countrymen an openness to other cultures, one in turn that can contribute to global commonality itself. His position thus proffers the type of "situated" critique of Eurocentrism that one might expect from a thinker sensitive to the historically contextualized conditions of thought and experience—a critique initiated from within the ambit of Western culture itself.

Notes

1. For recent critiques of Hegel's Eurocentrism, see Robert Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," in *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett (New York: Routledge, 1998), 41–63 and Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): 821–65. That Hegel might be the preeminent proponent of philosophical Eurocentrism is asserted by Enrique Dussel, "Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity," in *The Cultures of Modernity*, ed. Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 3.
2. See Ram Adhar Mall, *Intercultural Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 51.
3. Robert Bernasconi, "Religious Philosophy: Hegel's Occasional Perplexity in the Face of the Distinction between Philosophy and Religion," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 45/46: 1–15.
4. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 11 (hereafter *Lectures*).
5. This is so for one thing simply because any type of historiography is unavoidably theory-laden. "Even the ordinary, run-of-the mill historian who believes and professes that his attitude is entirely receptive, that he is dedicated to the facts, is by no means passive in his thinking; he brings his categories with him, and they influence his vision of the data he has before him." *Lectures*, 29.
6. For a statement of the reconstructive character of Hegel's approach to reality, see Klaus Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," in *Hegel: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 101–24.
7. *Lectures*, 29.
8. *Ibid.*, 27.
9. *Ibid.*, 29.
10. The "dialectical process of becoming is only the ideal expression of the real movement through which capital comes into being." See *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (London: Penguin, 1973), 310.
11. "The systematically reconstructable patterns of development of normative structures . . . depict a *developmental logic* inherent in cultural traditions and institutional change." *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1979), 98.
12. *Lectures*, 11; amended.
13. For the idea of Hegel's metaphysics as a "normative ontology," albeit one somewhat different than that adumbrated here, see Klaus Hartmann, "Linearität und Koordination in Hegels Rechtsphilosophie," in *Hegels Philosophie des Rechts: Die Theorie der Rechtsformen und ihre Logik*, ed. Dieter Henrich and Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), 305–16.
14. *Lectures*, 67; amended.

15. Ibid., 33.
16. Ibid., 54.
17. Compare Ludwig Siep, "Das Recht als Ziel der Geschichte," in *Das Recht der Vernunft: Kant und Hegel über Denken, Erkennen und Handeln*, ed. Christel Fricke et al. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), 355–80.
18. In "The Dialectic of Civil Society," K.-H. Ilting distinguishes between two approaches used by Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*: "a phenomenology of the consciousness of freedom" and a "philosophical reconstruction" of that concept. The position advanced here is that in Hegel's account of a history of freedom, the two approaches are one and the same. See "The Dialectic of Civil Society, in *The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel's Political Philosophy*, ed. Z. A. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 216f especially.
19. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 22 (hereafter *PR*).
20. G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 75.
21. *The Philosophy of Mind*: Part III of the *Encyclopædia of Philosophical Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), §393A (hereafter *Enc.*). See further Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth, and History*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 175f.
22. In addition to work by Robert Bernasconi, see, for instance, Michael H. Hoffheimer, "Hegel, Race, Genocide," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXXIX (2001): 35–62 and "Race and Law in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion," in *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Valls (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 194–216.
23. *Enc.*, §482.
24. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §185 (hereafter *PR*).
25. *Lectures*, 54.
26. *Jenaer Systementwürfe III*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Hamburg: Meiner, 1987), 239.
27. *Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover, 1956), 343.
28. *PR*, §124.
29. *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 20, 329; emphasis added (hereafter *Werke*).
30. *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).
31. Consider Rorty's "frankly ethnocentric" championing of Western values. See "Justice as a Larger Loyalty," in *Cosmopolitanism: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Chea and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 45–58.
32. *Lectures*, 54.

33. See, for instance, Claude Ake, "The African Context of Human Rights"; Roger T. Ames, "Rites as Rights: The Confucian Alternative"; and Kenneth K. Inada, "A Buddhist Response to the Nature of Human Rights," all in Larry May et al., *Applied Ethics: A Multicultural Approach*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2002).

34. *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 51.

35. *PR*, §343.

36. *Lectures*, 56; amended.

37. Susan Buck-Morss concludes the critique of Hegel she advances in "Hegel and Haiti" with the following question: "What if every time that the consciousness of individuals surpassed the confined of the present constellations of power in perceiving the concrete meaning of freedom, *this* were valued as a moment, however transitory, of the realization of absolute spirit?" (op. cit., 865). Without disputing her assertions either about Hegel's blindness to the historical realities of slavery or the limitations in his general treatment of world history, I would simply note that attention to processes whereby individuals do surpass the confines of the present is a component in his own account of the logic of a history.

38. *Enc.*, §394.

39. *PR*, §248.

40. *Ibid.*

41. See Erzsébet Rózsa, " 'Versöhnlichkeit' als europäisches Prinzip: Zu Hegels Versöhnungskonzeption in der Berliner Zeit," in *Vermittlung und Versöhnung: Die Aktualität von Hegels Denken für ein zusammenwachsendes Europa*, ed. Michael Quante and Erzsébet Rózsa (Münster: LIT, 2001), 21–52. This point will be addressed more fully in the final section of this paper. Here, though, it can be noted that, the very appeal to mutuality may itself reaffirm Western values. This is so not just for the obvious reason that mutuality is a two-way street, one that involves as much openness on the part of non-Western to Western cultures as the converse. It is also so in the sense that the very structure of mutuality may itself enforce a Western bias. Not only does reciprocal recognition, for Hegel, center, in origin as in goal, on the idea of subjective freedom; the very idea of reciprocity is rooted in a notion of freedom—*bei sich Selbst sein*—that for Hegel finds articulated expression in modern societies. Nor can this form of Western dominance be easily contested, since any challenge, be it in declarations of independence or claims to recognition, arguably affirms the structures of recognition in question. In this regard Hegel anticipates the analyses of contemporary social theorists who assert that, under conditions of globalization, Western categories have become inescapable. Still, in also asserting the inescapability of structures of dialectical mediation, Hegel allows for a measure of cross-cultural dialogue that goes beyond any one-sided imposition of Western values on other cultures. On the inescapability of Western categories, see Depesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post Colonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000).

42. *Enc.*, §490.
43. *Lectures*, 90.
44. See Hennig Ottmann, "Die Weltgeschichte," in *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. Ludwig Siep (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 279f.
45. See Fred R. Dallmayr, *G.W.F. Hegel: Modernity and Politics* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1993), 9.
46. *Lectures*, 93.
47. "We are what we are through history." Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy I* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 2.
48. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 492.
49. *Lectures*, 136.
50. See Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 31–36.
51. *PR*, §346.
52. *Ibid.*; emphasis added.
53. *Lectures*, 126.
54. *Ibid.*, 128.
55. *Ibid.*, 130.
56. See, for instance, Dilip Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
57. This seems to be the approach of Charles Taylor in "Two Theories of Modernity," in *Alternative Modernities*, 172–96.
58. *PR*, §270.
59. *Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1966), 2.
60. For an important discussion of Hegel's political writings as an exercise in civic education, see Laurence Dickey, *Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit: 1770–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
61. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy III*, 593. None of this entails that Hegel renounces his strictures on philosophy "instructing" the world. Here, too, he remains committed to the view that philosophy has no direct (*unmittelbar*) effect on public life (see *Werke* 17, 343f.). Philosophers should not rule, nor should they be directly involved in shaping of public policy. However, philosophy can have bearing on the consciousness of those who do engage in these activities, and in this mediated sense—that fitting for a philosopher of mediation—it is appropriate.
62. See *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 120f.
63. *PR*, §297A.
64. *Ibid.*, §296; amended. For a treatment of the role of *Bildung* in the development of the Prussian bureaucracy (but one that does not consider Hegel), see Hans Rosenberg's classic study *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660–1815* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), especially 182–92.
65. *PR*, §297A.
66. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts*, 1819/20 Lecture, ed. Dieter Henrich (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), 258 (hereafter *PR 1818/19*).

67. *PR*, §297. Hegel also refers to the corps of civil servants as “the intelligence and educated self-consciousness of a people.” See *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818–1831*, ed. Karl-Heniz Ilting (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1973), 334.

68. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen Über Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft: Heidelberg 1817/18*, transcribed by P. Wannenmann, ed. C. Becker et al. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1983), §170, 265 (hereafter Wannenmann).

69. Alexandre Kojève, *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, ed. Bryan-Paul Frost (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

70. See my “Hegel’s Concept of an International ‘We,’ ” in *Identity and Difference in Hegel’s Logic, Philosophy of Spirit, and Politics*, ed. Philip Grier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

71. For a discussion of this point with reference to current issues in international law and diplomacy, see Bryan-Paul Frost and Robert Howse’s “Introductory Essay” in Kojève’s *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, op. cit., especially pp. 18–24.

72. *PR*, §209; for the relationship of restricted and unrestricted accounts of spirit, see *PR*, §340.

73. Wannenmann, §170.

74. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 41–54.

75. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* III, 552.

76. Compare *The Philosophy of History*, 442. In this regard Hegel’s position bears interesting resemblance to that of Max Weber, whose theory of history is also often perceived as advancing objectivistically universalist claims about global development. He writes: “A product of modern European civilization studying the problem of universal history is bound to ask himself, and rightly so, to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared (*at least as we like to think* [emphasis added]) to lie on a line of development having *universal* significance and validity. See *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner’s, 1958), 13.

77. However, he does claim that the “Oriental” image of the Phoenix provides a different model of historical development, one that—employing categories of nature rather than spirit—notes how the destruction of one culture contains the seeds for the transition to a new stage of development. See *Lectures*, 32.

78. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

79. *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 195f. For one example, deriving from Taylor, see Xin Liu, *The Otherness of Self: A Genealogy of Self in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). I thank Marek Hrubec for this reference.

80. *PR*, §347.

81. I have dealt with these issues at greater length in “Hegel’s Concept of an International ‘We,’ ” op. cit.

82. *Philosophy of History*, 342.

83. In contrast to divine wisdom, *Weltweisheit* denotes human reason unaided by revelation and directed to the realities of finite experience. As Hegel

notes, the term derives from the Middle Ages and was revived by Friedrich Schlegel and others, who sought to contrapose philosophy to religion and theology. Hegel himself utilizes the term, but rejects any rigid distinction between the spiritual and the secular. Such distinction is incompatible both with his view of the relationship of reason and revelation and his understanding of the divine, for which the infinite can and must find expression in finite reality, particularly in human knowledge and self-consciousness. As a result, Hegel advances a particularly rich conception of worldly wisdom, one based on the comprehensive integration of spiritual and secular considerations. On his view *Weltweisheit* entails, among other things, a conception of cross-cultural understanding that ascribes, at least in part, intrinsic or “infinite” worth to every particular culture. It also entails the concept of *Weltgeist*, according to which every specific culture not only can express with others a common principle, but can be seen as contributing to a shared global culture, one that tendentially takes the form of a global consciousness. For Hegel’s discussion of the concept of “worldly wisdom,” see *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* I, 60f.

84. *PR*, §339.

85. *Ibid.*, §337.

86. *Ibid.*, §340.

87. *Ibid.*

88. Philosophical historiography “has not to do with what is gone but with the living present.” *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* I, 39; see also p. 3.

Hegel's New World

History, Freedom, and Race

Sûrya Parekh

Introduction

Is race significant to Hegel's¹ philosophy of history? Commentators² are divided between those who find in Hegel's philosophy of history, the account of Africa in particular, a pervasive reliance on race that implicates not only the philosophy of history but the philosophical system as a whole³ and those who consider race contingent to the movement of spirit within the progression that is history. For the latter, Hegel's powerful and dynamic philosophy of freedom is itself without bias because its basis lies in Hegel's definition of the human as immanently rational. The principle for this philosophy of freedom is that the development of freedom is the actualization of this immanent reason. Freedom is thus a universal telos. This principle is the criterion by which historical progression is discerned. History is the exposition of this principle, the dialectical unfolding of the self-conscious awareness of freedom. This basis for the normative human with equal rights in Hegel's political philosophy, rights that for Hegel cannot be nullified by racial difference, supposedly leaves Hegel's philosophy free from any necessary relationship to race.

Houlgate has given this line of argument in *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*.⁴ He argues that Hegel's comparison of civilizations so as to consider some more advanced than others does not involve a "doctrine of 'cultural imperialism' or 'racial superiority.'" ⁵ Instead, this comparison uses a purportedly dynamic and impartial criterion—the dialectical unfolding of the self-conscious awareness of freedom—to make these evaluations. Thus, although the historical accounts

of peoples designate different stages of the self-conscious awareness of freedom, the principle of evaluation is itself without bias. Although racial and geographic factors do play a role in the makeup of a particular *Volksgeist*, they are contingent factors subordinate to “a civilization’s mode of *understanding* the world and itself.”⁶

Commenting on Hegel’s specific account of race, given in the *Zusatz* to §393 in the *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, Houlgate admits that geographical differences, which give rise to racial and national differences, do set “limits to what certain peoples may achieve in history through their own efforts.”⁷ Nonetheless, they are natural determinations subordinate to the power of rational thought and become “weaker . . . as we become more educated.”⁸ Thus, “such naturally determined character does not prevent individuals or whole peoples being *educated* into the ways of freedom.”⁹ The minimal expression of the definition of the human as immanently rational seems to be the capacity for education, which allows individuals and peoples to overcome natural determinations. To demonstrate the universality and consistency of this capacity, one can note that although Hegel makes prejudicial statements about Africans, the lowest major race in his hierarchy of races, he also indicates that they “cannot be denied a capacity for education,” that the term *animal humanity*, used to describe Africans (*PWH*, 177; *VPW*, 218), is “totally other than animality,” “impressed with the character of humanity,” and contains the “real [*realle*] possibility to be rational” (*PWH*, 133; *VPW*, 161–62; my translation). This lowest major race in Hegel’s schema of race also provides the paradigm cases for education into freedom in the philosophy of history, namely, the freedom attained by African slaves in Brazil and Haiti.

This would seem to demonstrate that the definition of the human as in itself rational, or its equivalence, formal freedom, is not racially exclusive, and can through education lead to actualized freedom. Admittedly, this comes at a heavy cost, requiring us to accept the loss of life and violence accompanying slavery in Africa and the Americas as a precondition to education into freedom; nonetheless, on formal grounds, it would seem that race imparts no immutable limitation on the potential for freedom. This would support one commentator’s claim that Hegel’s comments are “incompatible with the view that biology is destiny, a fate that ineluctably attends a people and is indelibly inscribed in every individual son and daughter of it.”¹⁰

Using a similar line of reasoning, Moellendorf has argued that although Hegel gives the biological category of race more weight than he should by considering geographic differences necessary—and hence

rationalizing racial differences—race is still only made possible by, not a necessary consequence of, his claims about spirit.¹¹

It would seem that potentially necessary racial differences are ultimately natural determinations contingent to the principle of freedom. Walsh's conclusion that "we can take it that prejudice as well as ignorance come into them [*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*] at some point, without having to deny that the main judgments are based upon principle"¹² seems to be valid.

Thus, Hegel can strongly reject racial differences as necessary in his comments on race and instead state, "The human is in itself rational; herein lies the possibility of equality of rights of all humans,—the nullification of a stark distinction between those of the human species with rights and those without" (*PSS* 46–47; translation modified).¹³

This interpretation is, however, authorized by a Hegelian break from a Kantian conception of race. Hegel's comments show him to be incorporating Kant's conception of race as a moment whose contingency is revealed in the movement of spirit. Fixed, racial differences become mutable, natural, contingencies. Hegel's remarking of racial difference as a diversity reflects this movement. At the limit of his concept of race, Kant negotiates a tension between the division of the worlds and his concept of race, in the inhabitants of the New World. This tension produces a paradoxical gesture: the use of a racial explanation for a racial exception.

How does Hegel cope with this tension? It is this question that is the focus of this paper.

I

Hegel's account of the New World has a place in the polemic that Antonello Gerbi has titled, in the book with the same name, *La disputa del Nuovo Mondo* (*The Dispute of the New World*).¹⁴ Within the many vicissitudes and contradictions of this polemic are two theses, the first of which is the driving force: the inferiority of the New World in every way to the Old; and the New World as a future to the Old World. Gerbi locates in Hegel's account both an apex to the polemic, because his account powerfully articulates these two theses, synthetically uniting them, and at the same time anachronistic, the polemic having by this time been systematically refuted.¹⁵

The thesis of inferiority was first systematically developed by Buffon in the context of developing a classificatory system of global distribution

of fauna. From the start, Buffon's thesis was untenable and counter to empirical observation: he suggested that the cold and humid climate of the Americas made it unsuitable for species to thrive there. This climatic theory supported another thesis, which had already been associated with the inferiority with the inhabitants: a perverse sexuality of the New World inhabitants, characterized by a lesser ability to procreate.

Although Buffon did not extend his scientific thesis to humans, he speculated that "Nature had treated him [the New World inhabitant] less as mother than as stepmother, withholding from him the sentiment of love or the strong desire to multiply."¹⁶ The Prussian philosopher, the abbe Cornelius de Pauw extended this thesis to humans and added the vices of gluttony, drunkenness, ingratitude, and pederasty.¹⁷ From these ignoble beginnings, this thesis of absolute inferiority expressed in a lesser ability to copulate developed, further supported by claims of lactating men, non-menstruating women, small penises, and other fictions.

I briefly situate Hegel's place in the history of this polemic, in the persistence of this thesis of inferiority in a line of philosophers, from Buffon to Hegel and including Kant. I consider the persistence of this thesis, which from its inception in Buffon was already facing empirical counterevidence, a historico-philosophical problem, which I will call the problem of the New World.

Philosophical anthropologies of the eighteenth century grappled with the problem of how to formulate a unity of the human. Unlike polygenetic theories, which could rationalize human differences as biological differences arising from multiple origins, monogenetic theories required the formulation of a common origin that could still account for human difference. This led to the use of theories of climatic and geographic determinism to formulate accounts that commenced from a common genus but then hierarchized human differences in nonoriginary natural differences, namely, some composite of climate and geography. The biologization of these natural differences, as in Kant, produced a scientific conception of race and the development of the science of natural history.¹⁸ In Kant, a theory of human migration, whether motivated by nature or autonomy, is held responsible for the divergence from a single origin, which subsequently leads to the formation of races.

Nonetheless, these monogenetic accounts inherited a problem that had earlier confronted Christian theologians: How to account for life in the New World?

The tension is between the division of the world into Old and New, a division that is metaphysical, and seems to require an absolute newness to the New World, and the incorporation of the inhabitants of the New

World to a racial anthropology. The reasons for this insistence on the new are complex and enigmatic, and I probe them no further here.

This tension produces in Kant's anthropology an uneasy gesture: the use of a racial explanation—here understood as the conceptual, including physical, suitability of inhabitants to an environment—for a racial exception—the total unsuitability of New World inhabitants to their environment.¹⁹

This gesture incorporated the thesis of inferiority of the New World inhabitants. The effect of this thesis was to offer a partial solution to the problem of the New World, namely, a thesis of inferiority whose inevitable consequence was the vanishing of the New World inhabitant, whether through external contact with Europeans, internal weakness, or both.

This solution, however, assumes a conflation of the phenomenon of genocide with the ambiguous trope of vanishing. Conflation of the two is common in these works, nonetheless, the trope of vanishing performs work that exceeds its descriptive sense. A primary function of this trope, in forecasting the destiny of the New World inhabitants as vanishing, is to allow these philosophers to prophesy a future that alleviates the need to incorporate these inhabitants in the unity of the human. Although genocide did occur, its inevitable or necessary result was not a total vanishing.²⁰ The resolution to the problem of the New World is, in effect then, a displacing of the problem vis-à-vis vanishing. In opting for this solution, the unity of the human that these philosophers formulate is thus substantially based on the Old World human.

The Hegelian break consists in shifting the “proof” for the unity of the human from a genetic unity to a dialectic of freedom, which through its teleological development “proves” the unity. The task in such a philosophy is not to formulate a unified basis that serves as the best starting point but to properly comprehend the immanent development of freedom, which is itself the basis for this unity. The truth of theories of descent within this philosophy is that they are contingent, posing no immanent limit to the historical movement of spirit. There is, thus, no need to formulate a theory of racial formation in a philosophical commentary on race. This also allows Hegel to reject racial differences as justified in the possibility of equal rights.

With regard to the racial diversity of humans [*Menschen*], it must be observed at the outset that the merely [*bloß*] historical question as to whether all human races have descended from a single pair [*Paar*] or from several is of no concern

whatever to us in philosophy. The question has been regarded as important, since it has been thought that by assuming descent from several pairs [*Paaren*] one might explain the spiritual superiority of one human species over the other. The hope has even been entertained that one might prove humans [*Menschen*] to be so naturally different in respect of their spiritual aptitudes, that some might be treated as animals. The freedom and supremacy of humans [*Menschen*] can derive neither justification nor invalidation from descent. The human is in itself rational; herein lies the possibility of equality of rights of all humans,—the nullification of a stark distinction between those of the human species with rights and those without. (*PSS*, 44–47; translation slightly modified)

Nonetheless, according to Gerbi, the accomplishment of the polemic of the New World, in which both theses are positively affirmed and synthetically united in a single account, is to be found in Hegel's work, at a time when the thesis of inferiority had been systematically discredited. In this chapter, I do not treat Hegel's place in the history of this polemic.²¹ My task, instead, is to approach the suggestion that this polemic responds to a historico-philosophical problem indirectly, through an analysis of its incorporation in Hegel's philosophical system.

II

Hegel's comments on race are a moment in the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, in the volume titled *Anthropology*, and belonging to the first division, titled "Natural Soul." Natural Soul marks the appearance of soul as the immediate truth of nature. The *Anthropology* as a whole charts a movement from the indeterminacy of the genus, the abstract universal, to the appearance of the ego or consciousness, the actualization of soul.

The movement of soul interiorizes nature. It is "the microcosm in which nature concentrates itself and so sublates its juxtaposition" (*PSS*, 26–27). This transition from nature to spirit is thus also a movement from the predominance of space to time and juxtaposition to sequence (*PWH*, 128; *VPW*, 154).

Racial diversity is the initial determination of the soul. After accounting for the limited influence of various natural phenomena—planetary motion, seasonal and climatic change, the times of the day—Hegel turns to the natural differences that produce the universal, qualitative determinations of the soul that are race (*PSS*, 22–23). These are the necessary,

terrestrial divisions of the Earth. Two are mentioned in the thesis itself. The first is the difference between continents: "The universal planetary life of the natural spirit particularizes itself in the concrete differences of the Earth and separates into particular natural spirits, which express as a whole the nature of the geographic continents and constitute racial diversity" (PSS, 44–45; translation modified). The second is the polarity of North and South: "The opposition of terrestrial polarity, through which the land in the north is more concentrated . . . brings into the difference between continents a modification" (PSS, 44–45, translation modified).

The determination of racial diversity is constituted by the differences between continents and modified by the terrestrial expression of the polarity of North and South, namely, a concentration of the land in the North. There is, however, a third necessary, terrestrial division of the Earth, one that is only introduced in the *Zusatz*: "The main dividing of the Earth is that into the old and new world" ("*Die Hauptunterscheidung der Erde ist die in die alte und in die neue Welt*"). For a division that is here called the main division, and in the *PWH* "no mere external difference . . . the division is essential" ("*kein bloß äußerlicher Unterschied . . . die Einteilung ist wesentlich*") (PWH, 162; VPW, 199; translation modified), it is peculiar that Hegel does not treat it directly—if only to determine and minimize its influence. Instead, he seems to devalue its importance, stating, "we are concerned here with the determinateness constituting the distinctive character of the continents" (PSS, 48–49).

That Hegel wishes to draw our attention away from this difference should, therefore, draw our attention. And, if on the one hand, he seems to draw our attention away from it, the very next sentence treats this division. A curious parallel is introduced.

He says, "It must be said in this regard, that America has a younger appearance than the Old World and falls behind it in its historical formation [*Bildung*]" (PSS, 48–49; my translation). America here has the signification of a specific location on the Earth (whether the New World has continents or not is never clarified) and a metonym for the New World. As we shall see, this is in line with Hegel's general argument concerning the division of the worlds: whereas in the Old World, spirit particularizes itself into determinate difference, in the New World, these differences never become determinate.

In the *Philosophy of Nature*, in the section titled "Organic Nature," Hegel posits that after the division of the world into an Old and New, there is "the further division of former into continents distinguished from one another and from the new world by their physical, organic, and

anthropological character, to which an even younger and more immature one is joined (*PN*, 278, §339).²² Whereas the Old World divides into a determinate set of differences in the continents that constitute a unity, the land masses in the New World are indeterminate.

What, however, is the difference that constitutes this division into Old and New? What is the qualitative difference between the Old and New World? If on the one hand, this difference is “essential,” on the other, it is not clear as to how to situate it.

Is it simply a matter of the time of discovery, because “this difference relates itself at first to the earlier or later world-historical acquaintance of this earth-part [*Erdteile*]” (*PSS*, 48–49; my translation)? It would seem not. In the *PWH*, Hegel says, the New World is “not only relatively but rather absolutely [*überhaupt*] new, by virtue of its wholly peculiar physical and political characteristics” (*PWH*, 162; *VPW*, 199; translation modified).

The peculiar physical characteristics, the “younger appearance” of the New World is not geological: “Its geological age does not concern us here. I will not deny it the honour of also having risen from the sea at the time of the world’s creation” (*PWH*, 162; *VPW*, 199). Yet he calls the New World geographically immature. A strange temporality governs the New World. Time, whether natural or historical, is different in the New World. Its result is that the New always appears new in distinction to the Old, younger or more immature to the unity and totality of the Old.

This temporality is reflected in the natural principle that Hegel says governs the New World. At the start of his section on the Old world, Hegel lists the three geographic principles that constitute the totality of the Old World: the upland principle, great river valleys, and coastal lands. In a parenthetical aside, Hegel then says, “The only principle left over for America would be that of incompleteness [*Nichtfertigseins*] or constant non-fulfillment [*Nichtfertigwordens*]” (*PWH*, 172; *VPW*, 212). Incompleteness and nonfulfillment do not quite capture the temporality of the German here, denoting a principle, as it does, of perpetually becoming without ever having quite been.

This principle then reflects a peculiar status for the New World: it is neither indeterminate nor determinate, but rather perpetually immature. The New World appears as an immature copy of the Old, but with no qualitative difference. It is no surprise that the magnetic polarity of North and South appear in a more general form in the New World (*PSS*, 48–49).

What are the consequences of this division for Hegel’s racial anthropology?

The necessary continental differences determine the “physical and spiritual relations [*Beziehung*] of the racial varieties of humankind connected with these differences” (PSS, 50–51; translation modified).²³ These are the determinate differences of the continents in the Old World, with whom “physiology distinguishes itself in its first reference the Caucasian, Ethiopian, and Mongolian race.” What of the inhabitants of the New World, the races that Hegel calls Malay and American? They “rank themselves here,” but they are incomplete: “they form more of an aggregate of infinitely various particularities than a sharp, distinct race” (*“aber mehr ein Aggregat unendlich verschiedener Particularitäten als eine scharf unterschiedene Race bilden”*) (PSS, 50–51; my translation). This is repeated in the physiognomical differences: “The Malay and American races are in their physical formation less sharply designated than the races just described” (*“Die malaiische und die amerikanische Race sind in ihrer physischen Bildung weniger als die eben geschilderten Racen scharf ausgezeichnet”*) (PSS, 52–53; my translation).

In their spiritual significance, there are only four races: the Malay is no longer mentioned.²⁴ The three Old World races form a dialectical totality: the immediate universal in the Negro, the unmediated opposition in the Mongolian, and the absolute unity in the Caucasian. In distinction, we have the American, who are a “weak, vanishing, *Geschlecht*” (PSS, 60–61).

In the *PWH*, the thesis of inferiority is incorporated on this basis: “The inferiority of these individuals in every respect [*jeder Rücksicht . . . erkennen*], including stature [*die Grosse*], can be recognized in every particular” (*PWH*, 164; *VPW*, 202; translation modified).²⁵ That Hegel extends this thesis to the animals of the New World testifies to the imprecision of the difference.²⁶

The “difference” is on the one hand infinitely determinable, imposing on every particular a measure—old or new—the aggregate of which distinguishes the Old and New World; on the other hand, the “difference” itself is never determinate. This “difference” then mediates the dialectical unity of the Old in opposition to the immaturity of the South. The New World and its inhabitants are in every way an immature version of the Old. This “difference” is not in Hegel’s terms a proper racial difference.

Hegel offers specific examples of the inferiority in particulars, describing the inhabitants as spiritless (*geistlos*), exhibiting drivelessness (*Trieblosigkeit*), meek (*Sanftmut*), and with little capacity for culture (*von geringer Fähigkeit der Bildung*) (*PWH*, 164; *VPW*, 201–202, translation modified). The New World inhabitant, it would seem, has little capacity to work or for education, casting into doubt whether

the definition of the human as in itself rational applies to the New World inhabitant.

The implications of this division are perhaps best seen in the opposition between the American and the African, who is the example of the Old World human. The New World is a topos of freedom for the African. How is this opposition characterized? “[T]he weakness of the American’s *Naturells* was a main reason [*Hauptgrund*] why Negroes were brought to America, in order to allow the work to be done through their force; for the Negro is more receptive to European culture than the Indians” (*PWH*, 165; *VPW*, 202; translation modified).

This receptiveness leads to free citizens in Brazil and the professional accomplishments of Negroes in the Americas: “An English writer reports that, among the wide circle of his acquaintances, he had encountered instances of negroes becoming skilled workers and tradesmen, and even clergymen and doctors, etc. But of all the free native Americans he knew, he could think of only one who had proved capable of study and who eventually become a clergyman; but he had died soon afterwards as a result of excessive drinking” (*PWH*, 165; *VPW*, 202–203; translation modified).²⁷ The English writer here is Henry Koster, and Hegel significantly distorts his account.²⁸

This opposition of the worlds guarantees for the African, the lowest major race in Hegel’s schema, a telos of freedom, while at the same time excluding the Americans. Yet, it is not a difference that seems to be reducible to dialectics.

What is his solution to the problem of the New World?

III

When considering the spiritual significance of the races, Hegel says of the Americans that they are a “weak, vanishing, *Geschlecht*.” *Geschlecht* here names the “difference,” operating at a greater level of abstraction than race, which marks the division of the worlds. In contrast to the dialectical totality of the major races, the minor races—one or two—are destined to vanish. This emphasis on vanishing has its counterpart, in the account in the *PWH*, in the encounter between the American and European:

The recent history of the transatlantic continent indicates that, although it did possess an indigenous culture when it was first discovered by the Europeans, this culture was destroyed through contact with them; the subjugation of the country amounted, in fact, to its downfall. We do have

information concerning America and its culture . . . but only to the effect that it was a purely natural culture which had to perish as soon as spirit approached it. America has always shown itself physically and spiritually impotent, and does so to this day. For after the Europeans had landed there, the natives were gradually destroyed by the breath of European activity. (*PWH*, 163; *VPW*, 200)

Hegel vacillates as to who is to blame for this vanishing. On the one hand, "the whole American world has been destroyed [*untergegangen*] and suppressed [*verdrängt*] by the Europeans." On the other hand, he juxtaposes these remarks, sometimes from one sentence to the next with "[t]he tribes [*Die Stämme*] of North America have in part vanished [*sind teils verschwunden*], and in part withdrawn from contact with the Europeans." This is due to "[t]heir degeneration [*Sie verkommen*]," which indicates a "lack of strength [*nicht die Stärke*]" to "join the free American states" (*PWH*, 163; *VPW*, 201; translation modified).

The difficulty in determining this difference is reflected in the multiplicity of terms used to both describe the vanishing/genocide and the inhabitants. Hegel says that they have been wiped out or exterminated (*ausgerottet*), died out (*ausgestorben*), vanished (*verschwunden*), gone under or perished (*untergegangen*) and suppressed (*verdrängt*). The inhabitants he describes as first American (*ersten Amerikaner*), inhabitant (*Bewohner*), tribe (*Stämme*), aboriginal (*Einwohner*), native (*Eingeborenen*), local (*Einheimisch*), and domestic (*inländische*).

The turning point in this account is the association of the thesis of inferiority with a lesser ability to procreate. Hegel says:

A priest [*Geistlicher*] has, I have remembered reading [*ich mich gelesen zu haben erinnere*], rung a bell at midnight so they [Americans] remember to fulfill their conjugal duties [*ehelichen Pflichten*], because by themselves, this would not have occurred to them. (*PWH*, 165; *VPW*, 202; translation modified)

With this fiction as justification for the thesis of inferiority, Hegel denies the New World inhabitant any place in the future. Thus, the New World inhabitant is "living from one day to the other, distant from higher thoughts and purposes" ("*die von einem Tage zum andern fortleben, fern von höhern Gedanken und Zwecken*") (*PWH*, 165; *VPW*, 202; translation modified).

Hegel thus concludes his treatment by stating, "Since the original American nation has vanished—or as good as vanished—the effective

population comes for the most part from Europe, and everything that happens in America has its origin there" (*PWH*, 165; *VPW*, 203).

In the *PSS*: "Finally, we have however to observe with regard to the original *Americans*, that they constitute a vanishing and feeble *Geschlecht* . . . It is clear therefore that the Americans are unable to hold their own against the Europeans, who will initiate a new American culture in the land they have conquered from the natives" (*PSS*, 62–63).

How are we to understand this vanishing? In the dialectical process of history, the vanishing of a peoples is part of the immanent movement of spirit, their essence preserved in the "depths of its [spirit] present" (*PWH*, 151; *VPW*, 183). The passing of life becomes meaningful through this progression.

The vanishing of the New World inhabitants is not dialectical. The vanishing is an immediate effect of the encounter of the Europeans and the Americans, without any struggle.

Hegel incorporates one of the main themes of the polemic. Like Kant, the New World inhabitant cannot be incorporated into Hegel's racial anthropology. The solution to this is to cast the inhabitants as vanishing.

IV

What is the relationship of this account of the New World to the unity of the human? As we have seen, the dialectical unity of the Old World seems to depend on the immaturity of the New World. In Hegel's anthropology, the determination of a dialectical unity of race as a totality is coterminous with the racial indetermination of the New World.

The destiny of the New World inhabitants as vanishing seemingly secures the unity of the Old World human as the unity of all humans. The movement of the anthropology, from a natural unity of the human in the genus to a spiritual unity in the Old World, would then depend on the vanishing of the New World inhabitant. If this constitutive moment depends on vanishing, it is mediated by another type of difference, which incorporates these inhabitants into the unfolding of freedom. Hegel says:

The only inhabitants of South American and Mexico who feel the need for independence are the *Creoles*, who are descended from a mixture of native and Spanish or Portuguese ancestors. They alone have attained a higher degree of self-awareness,

and felt the urge for autonomy and independence. . . . For this reason, the English have also adopted the policy in India of preventing the rise of a native Creole population, i.e., a people of mixed European and native blood. (*PWH*, 164; *VPW*, 201)

Some paragraphs later, Hegel again says, "And if at any time we speak of free citizens in South America, this applies only to peoples of mixed European, Asiatic, and American blood" (*PWH*, 165; *VPW*, 203). That this solution pertains only to the inhabitants of South America, whereas Hegel considers a total vanishing to have taken place in North America, will become clear shortly.

If the unity of the Old and New World human is a natural unity, in the sharing of a common genus and expressed in a capacity to procreate with each other, the subsequent movements that determine the spiritual unity of the human as in itself rational are biologized in a difference in blood. The division of the Old and New World, a division whose "difference" is perhaps irreducible to dialectics, now becomes biologized. This appeal to blood, then, marks a limit to Hegel's conception of race, the Old World inhabitants seemingly sharing a common blood in opposition to the New World inhabitants.²⁹

Is this natural determination of difference confined to this "difference"? The actualization of the ideal human is the German. How is the identity of the German with the normative human determined? Hegel says of the Germans:

The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new World. Its aim is the realization of absolute Truth as the unlimited self-determination of freedom—*that* Freedom which has its own absolute form itself as its purport. . . . The destiny of the German peoples is to be the bearers of the Christian principle. (*PH*, 341; *VPW*, 763)

The fulfillment of the German destiny as a world-historical people is signaled by the Reformation. Hegel notes that "[t]he time-honored and cherished *sincerity of the German people* is destined to effect this revolution out of the honest truth and simplicity of its heart" (*PH*, 414). It is a German, Luther, whose doctrine marks the Reformation. The principle and destiny of the German peoples is also the "essence of the Reformation: the human is through his self-determination to be

free” (“*der Mensch ist durch sich selbst bestimmt, frei zu sein*”) (PH, 417; VPW, 882; translation modified).

A question troubles Hegel: Why did the Reformation originate and not extend outside of the Germanic nations?

Here an important question solicits investigation:—why the Reformation was limited to certain nations, and why it did not permeate the whole Catholic world? The Reformation originated in Germany, and struck firm root only in the purely German nations; outside of Germany it established itself in Scandinavia and England. But the Romanic and Slavonic nations kept decidedly aloof from it. (PH, 419; VPW, 885)

The Slavonic nations, Hegel states, are “purely agricultural” and therefore “the agency of nature predominates” (PH, 420; VPW, 885). What is the reason for the Romanic Nations?

[T]he *Romanic nations* also—Italy, Spain, Portugal, and in part France—were not imbued with the Reformed doctrines. Physical force perhaps did much to repress them; yet this alone could not be sufficient to explain the fact, for when the Spirit of a Nation craves anything no force can prevent its attaining its desired object: nor can it be said that these nations were deficient in culture; on the contrary, they were in advance of the Germans in this respect. It was rather owing to the fundamental character of these nations, that they did not adopt the Reformation. But what is the peculiarity of character which hindered the attainment of Spiritual Freedom? We answer: the pure inwardness of the German nation was the proper soil for the emancipation of Spirit; the Romanic nations, on the contrary, have maintained in the most inner ground of their soul [*im innersten Grunde der Seele*—in their Spiritual Consciousness—the principle of *Disharmony*: they are a product of the fusion of Roman and German blood, and still retain the heterogeneity thence resulting. (PH, 420–21; VPW, 886)

At the realization of the ideal of the anthropology, blood marks a difference in the ground of the soul. The natural determination of the soul relates the capacity for freedom to blood, a relation that is conserved in the movement of spirit.

In two places, in the margins of Hegel's discourse of race, a natural determination produces a natural exception: in the New World, inhabitants who are naturally destined to vanish, unsuited to their environment; in the Germans, people who are naturally destined to be free of natural determination. Blood marks the difference in both peoples. These destinies coincide in North America.

The causality and temporality of nature in these moments is not that of an endlessly recurring cycle whose truth as contingency has been revealed. Instead, the causality of nature and freedom are united in these moments as identical.

The famous passages that end the account of the New World can now be read differently:

The American continent had in some respects outlived itself when we first came into contact with it, and in other respects, it is still not yet fully developed. . . . America is therefore the country of the future, and its world-historical importance has yet to be revealed in the ages which lie ahead—perhaps in a conflict between North and South America. It is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical arsenal of old Europe. . . . It is up to America to abandon the ground on which world history has hitherto been enacted. (*PWH*, 170–71; *VPW*, 209–10)

What has happened here until now [*Was bis jetzt sich hier ereignet*] is only [*nur*] an echo of the Old World and the expression of an *alien liveliness* [*fremder Lebendigkeit*]; and as a land [*Land*] of the future, it is of no interest to us here. The philosopher has nothing to do with prophecy [*Der Philosoph hat es nicht mit dem Prophezeien zu tun*]. In history, we are concerned with what has been and what is; in philosophy, however, we are concerned not with what belongs exclusively to the past or future, but with what *is* and eternally is [*was ist und ewig ist*] with reason. And with that we have more than enough to do. (*PWH*, 170–71; *VPW*, 209–10; translation modified)³⁰

This prophecy articulates a set of oppositions that have determined the progression of history: the polarity of North and South, Protestant and Catholic, and if one recalls that the English are a pure Germanic nation for Hegel, a “pure” people against a heterogeneous people. Given the natural determinations elucidated thus far, for this future to

be prophetic, rather than a destiny of spirit and nature, would require a *radical* overturning of the ground of world history. For it seems clear that North America is the destiny of world-historical spirit.

Conclusion

I have shown that the inhabitants of the New World form a type of limit to the determination of racial diversity, unable to be and unable to become, a race. The precise nature of this limit is difficult to specify, on account of this “difference” irreducible to dialectics: inferior in every particular, too diffuse to constitute a sharp difference.

I have also isolated the constitution of two “limits” of Hegel’s determination of race in an appeal to blood, in the movement from the natural unity of the genus to the spiritual unity of the human. On the one hand, the determination of race in Hegel’s thought in some ways marks an advance over Kant: within its limits, that is, within the hierarchy plotted from the Africans to the French, there is room for movement. Natural determinations are not immutable, changes can occur. Africans and Asians, it would appear, could be free in the New World. History can occur as well in this space, without any relationship to race. But at the limits of these progressions, there is an appeal to blood.

Thus, the Hegelian break is in effect a displacement, which at its “limits” constrains the progression of history and predetermines the movement of freedom. The movement constituting the transition from a natural unity in the genus to a spiritual unity of the human in reason is thus dependent on the exclusion of the “pure” inhabitants of the New World, who are consigned to vanish. The telos of freedom in Hegel is accessible only to the Old World human. In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel says:

If now in contrast to these epics we contemplate others that may perhaps be composed in the future, then these might have nothing to describe except the victory, some day or other, of living American rationality over imprisonment in particulars and measurements prolonged to infinity. For in Europe nowadays each nation is bounded by another and may not of itself begin with a war against another European nation; if we now want to look beyond Europe, we can only turn our eyes to America.³¹

We should note that this living rationality might also be a victory of the “purity” of spirit.³²

Notes

1. Frequently cited texts of Hegel along with abbreviations are: *VPW*—*Vorlesung über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Erste Hälfte, Band I: Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, Hrsg. J. Hoffmeister, 5th ed., and *Zweite Hälfte*, Hrsg. G. Lasson (Hamburg: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1955); *PWH*—*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); *PH*—*The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956); *PSS*—*Hegel's Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes*, Vol. II, English and German, trans. M. J. Petry (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978); *PN*—*Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970). For other works of Hegel in German, my reference is *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

2. I have benefited greatly from Robert Bernasconi's meticulous and careful scholarship and approach to the topic of philosophy and race generally, and the role of race in Hegel's philosophy. Regarding the latter, see "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti" in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. S. Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998); "With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Hegel's Eurocentrism," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 22, no.2 (2000):171–201; "With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin? Hegel's Role in the Debate on the Place of India within the History of Philosophy," in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. D. Duquette (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); "The Return of Africa: Hegel and the Question of the Racial Identity of the Egyptians," in *Identity and Difference: Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit, and Politics*, ed. Philip T. Grier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007; and "Hegel's Racism: A Reply to McCarney" *Radical Philosophy* 119 (May/June 2003): 4–6.

3. Analyses of Hegel's account of Africa that take some form of this position include Lewis Gordon, *Her Majesty's Other Children*; Christian Neugebauer, "The Racism of Hegel and Kant," in *Sage Philosophy*, ed. H. Odera Oruka (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 259–70; Sander Gilman, "Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche See the Black," in *Hegel-Studien*, Band 16 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann), 163–88; Molefi Assante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge*; James Snead, "On Repetition in Black Culture" *Black American Literature Forum* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 146–54; and Charles Verharen, "The New World and the Dreams to Which It May Give Rise: An African and American Response to Hegel's Challenge," *Journal of Black Studies*, 27, no. 4 (Mar. 1997): 456–93.

4. Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

5. *Ibid.*, 23.

6. *Ibid.*, 10.

7. *Ibid.*, 175.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 143.

11. Darrel Moellendorf, "Racism and Rationality in Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit," *History of Political Thought* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 243–55.

12. W. H. Walsh, "Principle and Prejudice in Hegel's Philosophy of History," in *Hegel's Political Philosophy*, ed. Z. A. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 197.

13. The PSS is a dual language edition, with the German and English on opposing pages. My practice is to cite both.

14. Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973). Gerbi's meticulous study of this polemic, which includes a chapter on Hegel's account of the New World, is one of few treatments of the original inhabitants of the New World. For Gerbi, Hegel's account is both an apex to the polemic and at the same time anachronistic. Jose Ortega y Gasset's thesis in his reading of Hegel's account of the New World is that the inferiority of the animals there is because they were the originals in "Hegel and America," in *Clio*, trans. L. Buchanan and M. Hoffheimer (Fort Wayne 1995), 25:1. I have benefited from Michael Hoffheimer's careful work on this topic in "Hegel, Race, and Genocide," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39 supplemental (2001): 35–62, and "Race and Law in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion," in *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, ed. A. Valls (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 194–216. G. A. Kelly in "Hegel's America," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1972): 3–36 confines himself to Hegel's comments on European America.

15. Gerbi, 418 and 438n.

16. George Buffon, *Oeuvres completes*, ed. Richard (Paris: Delangle, 1824–28), quoted in Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), 6.

17. Gerbi, 206.

18. See Robert Bernasconi "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race," in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (2001), 11–36 for this argument.

19. Immanuel Kant, "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy," in *Race*, op. cit.

20. See Jack Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) for an argument against the vanishing of Native Americans.

21. To treat Hegel's place in this polemic would require an analysis of how Hegel constructed his account, including the sources he selected, the sources that were available, and the details he chose to use or omitted. In this paper, I cite Hegel's use of two of his sources: Henry Koster's *Travels in Brazil* (microform) (London, 1817). (I have used a microform reprint of the original two volume second edition and an abridged edition, C. Harvey Gardiner, ed., *Travels in Brazil* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966); and

Prinz Maximilian zu Wied-Neuwied's *Reise nach Brasilien in den Jahren 1815 bis 1817* (St. Augustin: Gardez! Verlag, [1820] 2001, trans. as *Travels in Brazil in 1815, 1816, and 1817* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1820).

22. I am using the online version of the *Werke* (www.hegel.de) for the *Philosophy of Nature*. I cite, therefore, the thesis rather than page number.

23. Hegel's schema of race is derived from Johannes Blumenbach's third edition of his dissertation *De generis humani varietate nativa*, 3rd ed. (Microform) (Göttingae: Vandenhoeck et Ruprecht, 1795), trans. T. Bendyshe "On the Natural Variety of Mankind," in *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Hunter* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865). Blumenbach's schema posits three major races: the Ethiopian and Mongolian are at two extremes and the Caucasian is in the middle. Two minor or intermediate races mediate between the extremes and the medial race: the American, which mediates between the Mongolian and the Caucasian, and the Malay, which mediates between the Ethiopian and the Caucasian. Malay here refers to the Polynesians and Melanesians of the Pacific Islands, Australian Aborigines, and New Zealand Maoris. According to this schema, the three major races inhabit the Old World and the two minor races inhabit the New World. For Blumenbach, however, racial differences exist along a continuum such that typicality is not to be found. Hoffheimer suggests that the Kantian conception of race serves as the basis onto which this schema was superimposed, in "Hegel, Race, Genocide," 45.

24. Hegel is inconsistent as to whether there are five or four races, a difference between Blumenbach and Kant. In the lectures on the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* of 1825, Hegel lists five races, in accordance with Blumenbach. In his 1827–28 lectures, he lists four, in accordance with Kant's conception. See Bernasconi, "With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin?" 195 n.40 and Hoffheimer, "Hegel, Race, Genocide," 46.

25. Is this taken from Maximilian? Maximilian, refuting Herr von Eschwege's claim that only one tribe of Brazilians—the Puris—have small male genitals, says, "Mr. Von Eschwege adduces, as a peculiarity of the Puris, the smallness of the male sex [*männlichen Geschlechtsteile*]; but I must confess, that I found in this respect no remarkable difference between them and the other tribes; the Puris are in every respect [*Allgemeinen*] very little and all Brazilian tribes [*Stämme*] are, on this point, inferior to Europeans, and still more so to the Negroes" (137–38, 61).

26. Hegel states, "Even the animals [of the New World] show the same inferiority as human beings. The animal world [*Tierwelt*] of America includes lions, tigers, and crocodiles, but although they in fact [*zwar*] have a similarity in shape [*Gestaltung*] to their old world counterparts, they are in every consideration [*Rücksicht*], smaller, weaker, and less powerful [*unmächtiger*]. As one understands, the animals themselves are not as nourishing as the food [*Lebensmittel*] that the Old World provides. And although America has huge hordes of cattle, European beef is still regarded as a delicacy" (PWH, 163; VPW, 200; translation modified). Antonello Gerbi cites Alexander Humboldt's consternation: "I have organised my life very badly, and soon I shall have completely lost my

senses. I would willingly renounce the European beef that Hegel tells us is so superior to American beef, and I would love to dwell beside these weak and inoffensive crocodiles of his which are however, unfortunately, twenty-five feet long" (Gerbi, 417).

27. These examples have frequently been cited by commentators as evidence that Hegel's philosophy accords the potential for freedom to all people. That this example is situated in his account of the New World reveals a selective reading on the part of his commentators. See McCarney, 143 and Sandra Bonetto, "Race and Racism in Hegel—An Analysis," *Minerva—An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 10 (2006): 47.

28. There are at least three distortions in this account, which is taken from Henry Koster's *Travels in Brazil* (microform). Koster writes, "The priesthood is open to them [Indians]; but they do not take advantage of it*. I never saw an Indian mechanic in any of the towns; there is no instance of a wealthy Indian; rich mulattos and negroes are by no means rare" (120). The asterisked footnote reads, "I heard, from good authority, that there are two instances of Indians having been ordained as secular priests, and that both these individuals died from excessive drinking." The distortions are as follows: (1) the assertion that there are negro clergymen when Koster is clear that the clergy is not open to negroes; (2) the omission of the term *mulatto* from Hegel's account; and (3) the shifting from two individuals to a single one. It is not clear whether Hegel read Koster's book directly or the review in the "Quarterly Review" that included the passage above (PSS, 460).

29. The inclusion of Africans in this unity is not certain. Hegel omits any mention of mulattoes, or for that matter, any union that involves an African. In the *PWH*, Hegel refers to Creoles as offspring of Europeans or Asian with Americans. This is not consistent with the various usages of the term by his sources. Koster and Maximilian will both describe a complex system of classification. Maximilian uses the terms *Portuguezes* (natives of Portugal), *Brazileiros* ("Brazilians, or Portugese born in Brazil, of more or less purity in origin"), *mulattoes* ("union of whites with negroes"), *mamaluços* ("whites and Indians, also called Mestics"), *Negroes* ("pure African Negroes"), *Creoles* ("born of Negroes in Brazil"), *Caribocos* ("born of Negroes and Indians"), *Caboclos* ("civilised" Indians), and *Tapuyos* (wild Indians) (28, 9). Koster describes a similar schema except: he substitutes Creole whites for *Brazileiros*; *Caboclos* refers to domestic instead of "civilised" Indians; Creole Negroes refers to free Negroes; and mestizo is substituted for *Caribocos* (Koster [abridged], 174). I should add that Koster's account concerns only *Caboclos*, for he does not meet any *Tapuyos* (Koster [microform], 395). Further, the only reference I have found concerning the relations between Asians and Americans is a reference by Maximilian to nine Chinese day laborers who were brought to Rio de Janeiro. He indicates that "some of them have been converted and married to young Indians" (243, 110).

30. Commentators have understood Hegel to be here dismissing prophecy as if they knew what Hegel meant by the term. See G. A. Kelly, "Hegel's America"; Paul Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale Univer-

sity Press, 1999), 339–40; Stanley Rosen, “Hegel and Historicism,” in *G. W. F. Hegel: Critical Assessments*, ed. Robert Stern, Vol. IV (London: Routledge, 1993), 391–92; Charles Verharen, “‘The New World and the Dreams to Which It May Give Rise’: An African and American Response to Hegel’s Challenge,” 457–58; and George Kline, “Presidential Address: The Use and Abuse of Hegel by Nietzsche and Marx,” in *Hegel and His Critics: Philosophy in the Aftermath of Hegel*, ed. William Desmond Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 10. As a phenomenon to be studied by philosophy, Hegel was interested in prophecy, situating it in the *PSS* as a form of magnetic somnambulism. Referencing Plato’s *Timaeus*, Hegel indicates that prophecy has some claim to truth as it allows for a subjective or conditioned rising above the determinations of time (*PSS* 281–83). Hegel dismisses prophecy from the concern of the philosopher because it is an unreliable mode of cognition, precisely because it is only subjective.

31. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* Vol. III, in *Werke*, Vol. 15 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 353; *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1062. Catherine Malabou in her work, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*, trans. L. During (New York: Routledge, 2004) and more astonishingly, Daniel Berthold-Bond, in his article “Hegel’s Eschatological Vision: Does History have a Future,” *History and Theory* 27, no. 1 (Feb. 1988): 14–29, which explicitly references the theme of a Christian New World, both miss these accounts of the New World as a future in the philosophy of history and the *Aesthetics*. Some commentators who have dismissed Hegel’s claims of America as the future seem to miss this account in the *Aesthetics*. Thus, Franco will say, “It [Hegel’s claim that America is the land of the future in the philosophy of history] does not find an echo in anything else that Hegel wrote” (340).

32. I wish to thank David Marriott for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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PART III

The Historicity of Morality,
Ethical Life, and Politics

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Spirit without the Form of Self

On Hegel's Reading of Greek Antiquity

Allegra de Laurentiis

Introduction

In §6 of the Introduction to the 1830 *Encyclopaedia* Hegel mentions a requirement that there be an “external touchstone of the truth of a philosophy.”

In the following, this requirement is applied to Hegel's own assessment of the achievements of Greek antiquity with regards to what he calls “subjective freedom.” This is done here necessarily in a limited framework. Some important claims of Hegel's on the state and the individual are being compared to related claims by Plato and Aristotle on the *polis* and personhood; to expressions of popular attitudes and beliefs in Greek literature; and to contemporary scholarship on the political dynamics of the ancient city-state. In the end, Hegel's overall judgment on the “spirit of antiquity” appears corroborated, rather than relativized, by these “external touchstones” of its truth.

Much of Hegel's appraisal of Greek civilization is of course, in nineteenth-century fashion, nothing short of enthusiastic. When it comes to his own concern with “subjective freedom” however, Hegel's judgment on antiquity is severe and uncompromising: Greek popular and philosophic culture, he maintains, knew nothing of the concept nor of the ethical realizations of subjective free will. This is a very serious charge, as Hegel grounds the entire world of Right proper (*Recht*, *jus*) precisely in the shared recognition and institutional embodiment of subjective free will: “Only in the will as subjective can freedom, or

the will as it is *in itself*, be actual⁴¹ and: "Subjectivity constitutes the ground of existence of the concept of freedom."²

As stressed by Peperzak, Tuschling, and others,³ for Hegel the meaning of the Delphic Apollo's injunction "know thyself" lies in its philosophical, not psychological meaning. The oracle does not recommend introspection or self-criticism. Instead, it affirms that "the human being *as such* [*der Mensch überhaupt*] must know itself,"⁴ that is, it must know the essence of being human:

Know thyself, this absolute command, does not mean . . . mere *self-knowledge* of the *particular* abilities, character, drives and weaknesses of the individual, but rather knowledge of the true in man [*Mensch*] . . . as well as of the true in and for itself—of *essence* itself as spirit.⁵

Even in the quite different systematic context of the *Science of Logic*, knowledge of the self represents the innermost dynamic structure of spirit, thus the motive force of its movement: "The most important point for the nature of spirit is the relation, not only of what it is *in-itself* to what it is *actually*, but rather [the relation] of what *it knows itself to be*."⁶

This reading of the Socratic exhortation is the interpretive criterion of Hegel's account of the myth of Oedipus (to choose but one example) in the lectures on the *Philosophy of History*.⁷ Hegel understands the fall of the Egyptian Sphinx upon hearing Oedipus's solution to the riddle⁸ as symbolizing the fall of the "Oriental" phase of spirit vis-à-vis the rise of the "Greek" phase. He does credit "the Orient" for having raised for the first time the central question of philosophy, namely that of the nature of man, but he also charges it with failing to answer its own question. Oedipus's insight, then, would signify the dawning of human self-knowledge in Greek culture.

Yet Hegel considers the Greek contribution to be just that: a dawn. In Griesheim's transcription of the 1825–26 lectures on the *History of Philosophy*, Hegel indicts ancient Asian, Greek, and Roman civilizations together as incapable of a theoretical grasp and juridical-ethical fulfillment of the Socratic command. No ancient civilization created the kind of ethical world that could make self-reflexive knowledge and self-determining action possible:

The Greeks and the Romans, not to mention the Asiatics, knew nothing of this concept [of freedom], did not know that man as man is born free and is free. Neither Plato nor

Aristotle, neither Cicero nor the Roman jurists, and still less the Greek and Roman peoples, possessed this concept although it alone is the source of Right. They knew well enough that an Athenian, or a Roman citizen, an *ingenuus*, is free and that there are free men and slaves; therefore they did not know that man *as man* is free . . . that is, man as apprehended in thought and as he apprehends himself in thought.⁹

As is well known, the source of Oedipus's tragic fate following his encounter with the Egyptian Sphinx lies in his failure to know what he has done. His ignorance ranges from simple lack of insight to consciously self-inflicted blindness. For Hegel, this signifies the epochal tragedy of the Greeks' attempt and failure to pursue self-knowing:

But this ancient solution by Oedipus, who thereby shows that he is in the knowing, is coupled with immense ignorance regarding his own deeds. The rise of spiritual clarity in the old kingdom is still united with the horrors deriving from ignorance, and this first dominion of kings, in order to become true knowing and ethical clarity, must transform itself through civil laws and political freedom.¹⁰

Hegel's explicit theoretical account of self-knowing begins in the last chapter of the *Phenomenology* but is developed only in the *Science of Logic*. The final Doctrine of the Concept exhibits the logical structure of "self-determining substance." Having concluded previously that all substance is a "relation of substantiality [*Substanzverhältnis*]," Hegel now shows that "circular" or reflexive substantiality denotes the logical structure of subjectivity, that is, it describes the Concept (*der Begriff*).

The most general features of subjectivity, namely self-differentiation, self-reference, and self-development already exist in nature, namely in the living organism. At first, we read at the beginning of the Doctrine of the Concept, "the Concept is the principle of all life."¹¹ In a comment toward the end of the same Doctrine, Hegel explains:

From the standpoint of the understanding life is usually considered to be . . . *incomprehensible* . . . In fact, life is so far from being incomprehensible that on the contrary we have the Concept itself before us in it . . . But . . . the defect of life . . . consists in the fact that [in it] concept and reality still do not . . . correspond with one another . . . Hence, the

process of life consists in the overcoming of the immediacy in which life is still entangled; and this process . . . results . . . in the Idea . . . as *cognition*.¹²

While living matter is nature's analog to the logical Concept, only thinking is the element proper to it—from its simplest form as self-feeling soul to absolute knowing. Already in the closing pages of the *Phenomenology*, the Concept is referred to as spirit “in the form of Self [*in selbstischer Form*].”¹³

In the lectures on ancient philosophy, Hegel argues that pre-Socratic philosophy already contains intuitions of the self-referential nature of human thinking. For instance, the ancient thesis that knowledge is a kind of reminiscence indicates awareness that all knowledge depends logically upon self-knowledge, or that “the Concept remains at home with itself in the course of its process.” And yet, from Anaximander to Aristotle and the Roman philosophers we search in vain for a properly *conceptual* grasp of the self. With the dissolution of Western antiquity, those ancient intuitions metamorphose into the representational thinking of religious monotheisms. Only modern philosophy would be able to engage in the labor of grasping the self in the self's own terms—that is, conceptually.

As is well known, Hegel interprets the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages and Modernity as a “becoming subjective” of spirit. This does not indicate an increasing individualization but rather a growing universalization of subjectivity away from mere singularity. For example, the recognition of a *right* to individual satisfaction (as defined in the “Morality” section of the *Philosophy of Right*)¹⁴ amounts to a *universalization* of the singular will. This right to subjective particularity is then characterized a few sections later as “the turning- and center-point in the difference between *antiquity* and *modern* times.”¹⁵

To be sure, Hegel detects in Plato's work early forms of the conception of a necessary universalization of mere particularity. Yet he also points out that this notion plays there always a negative role. Plato would recognize subjective freedom only as a threat to the harmony of ethical life. Since the *kallipolis* is supposed to embody universality, and since singularity is in Plato's eyes its logical contradiction, the affirmation of individual interests cannot but represent a strident dissonance in the universal harmony. *Dikaiousune* is only guaranteed by purging the state of all singular and particular claims. Subjective freedom in Plato's *polis* is the enemy within.

Despite this, Hegel does encounter in the *Republic* signs of Plato's awareness of a potential compatibility between universality and

singularity. He points to the seemingly peculiar notion of a necessary parallelism between the just city and the good soul (Books II–IV). Despite its enormous significance in Socrates' discussions of justice and virtue, no attempt is made to ground this kinship either logically or metaphysically.¹⁶ Socrates merely praises its didactical advantages and compatibility with popular wisdom.¹⁷ The deeper ties of *polis* and *psyche* remain unaccounted for. In the 1820 Introduction to the lectures on the *History of Philosophy*, Hegel offers the following interpretation: the kinship of city and soul expresses the unity of objective and subjective spirit as moments of the Idea. Despite having detected this unity, Plato can explain it only at the “poor” conceptual level of his epoch, the “childhood of philosophizing.”¹⁸

In this context, Hegel's choice of Plato's *Republic* as illustration of the thesis that philosophy is fundamentally descriptive of its epoch rather than normative¹⁹ merits renewed attention.

The oft paraphrased passage from the *Philosophy of Right*, according to which philosophy takes flight only when an epoch “has attained its completed state” (Nisbet)²⁰ or “is already there cut and dried” (Knox)²¹ actually states that every epoch must have “completed its formative process and made itself ready [*nachdem die Wirklichkeit ihren Bildungsprozess vollendet und sich fertig gemacht hat*].” The reflexive “*sich fertig machen*” means “to make oneself ready”—not “to be finished” (*fertig sein*). Thus, the expression implies that an epoch readies itself for the next phase of spirit. Accordingly, philosophy does not merely grasp a closing epoch but—since to grasp is always to have surpassed—philosophy always also announces a new epoch as well. This is one reason why philosophers need not think of themselves as original creators of precepts for a new world order—as the new world is already unfolding under their eyes.

Yet even in the light of this, it still seems paradoxical on Hegel's part to choose the *Republic*, the archetype of all Western political utopias, to illustrate philosophy's nonnormative character. He writes: “[E]ven the *Platonic Republic* . . . has essentially apprehended nothing but the nature of Greek ethical life.”²² One is hard pressed *not* to read the *Republic* as prescribing, among other things, an ideal division of labor and a lifelong separation of individuals in classes as ultimate guarantors of justice. After all, Plato understands justice as harmony resulting from the class allocation of individuals on the basis of their talents, and from the lower class's sharing the conviction of the ruling class that its rule is legitimate:

If indeed the ruler and the ruled in any city share the same belief about who should rule, it is in this one [the temperate

city]. . . . It makes the weakest, the strongest, and those in between . . . all sing the same song together. . . . And this unanimity, this natural agreement between the worse and the better as to which of the two is to rule . . . is rightly called temperance.²³

Given the well-documented, conflict-ridden social history of Athens in the classical age, there would seem to be little doubt that Plato is not describing but rather prescribing a condition to be achieved. And yet, a close reading of Hegel's carefully chosen words helps dissolve the apparent paradox of his interpretation: Plato's "apprehending" the "nature" of Greek ethical life means neither that he describes the *polis'* reality (in the sense of *Dasein*) nor that he prescribes a utopian *Sittlichkeit* but rather that he *conceptualizes* the *essence* of Greek *actuality*.

Hegel's *Logic* defines actuality as the unity of the ground of existence and its appearance. It defines essence as "the sphere" in which everything "relates itself to itself . . . as a *being of reflection*, a being within which another shines while it shines within the other."²⁴ Accordingly Plato, in Hegel's interpretation, by conceptualizing the essence of Greek actuality is not so much describing social and political realities as he is developing the concept of the essence that underlies and transpires through them while in turn finding in them a form of its actualization.

Contemporary historical and philological research may help fill the perceived gap between the apparent reality and the deeper actuality of Plato's political world. The following sections discuss few but emblematic "touchstones of the truth" of Hegel's reading: caste and class, slavery and personhood, property and happiness, as they form Greek reality and inform Greek self-conceptions.

Caste as the Truth of Class

Far from being a place of harmony and unbroken continuity with the past, classical Athens is described by historians as a relatively self-contained world of antagonism and strife. This both bears the unmistakable marks of class struggle—not the essence Hegel focuses upon—and closely resembles forms of antagonism that define modern civil society, that is, the competition among particular interests and the conflict between these and the common good.

While Hegel largely ignores Plato's references to class struggle, historians have often called attention to them. Some have called these references "obsessive."²⁵ For example, Plato repeatedly characterizes oli-

garchy in terms of the mutual reenforcement of hostile classes: “money makers create . . . drones and beggars,” and the latter “plot” against the former, “longing for a revolution [*neoterismon erontes*].”²⁶ The same applies to democracy, which of course in Plato’s eyes fares no better than oligarchy. In his analogy of *demokratia* with a “sick body,” the fever of civil warring (*stasiazei*) takes central stage.²⁷ Since the *kallipolis* cannot countenance disharmony, Plato is in search of an authentic, stable, “natural” form of class. He finds it in what modern social historians would refer to as “caste.”

In a Hegelian perspective, the recourse to the infamous “myth of the metals” in the third book of the *Republic* offers Plato just such an alternative to the cacophony of classes. On the one hand, he is aware that this “useful falsehood” from barbarian mythology²⁸ is decidedly far-fetched in the light of his audience’s social experience. Socrates feigns embarrassment in propagating the myth: “I don’t know where I will get the audacity.”²⁹ On the other hand, he then proceeds to tell it in lavish detail. The myth suggests that meritocracy may not be the whole story behind the “just” allocation of individuals to estates. The real ground for the tripartite structure of the state may well lie in fate, divine caprice, or “nature,” that is, the gods’ bestowal of gold, silver, or bronze in the bloodstream of individuals.

Socrates’ embarrassment is due to the fact that the social immobility essential to castes is anathema to the self-image of class society as experienced by his contemporaries. In class society, as long as the reproduction of class structure is not in question, individual mobility is inevitable—and even encouraged. Plato’s insertion of the myth in his overall argument, despite all that would speak against it, becomes more understandable if viewed as part of a strategy to uncover the essence intrinsic to the *kallipolis*. It is the accident of birth, the caprice of destiny that underlies the apparently rational divisions of the state. Caste is the quintessential class, class stripped of appearances: the truth of class.

With this conception, Hegel argues, Plato reaffirms the preeminence of Eastern ancient *Sittlichkeit*. The so-called Eastern world—in the *Philosophy of Right* the chosen examples are India’s caste system³⁰ and Egyptian society³¹—is based on the “allotment of individuals to classes according to *mere* birth.”³²

As mentioned above, however, Hegel himself does not view class antagonism nor caste division as the essence of Plato’s *polis*. He locates it rather in the all-round conflict among particular interests and between these and the common good.

The historical Athens presents itself indeed as an ancient laboratory of modern civil society. The rise of an aristocracy of wealth joining the

ranks of birth nobility (and occasionally displacing it), a modest degree of social mobility, the establishment of popular juries, the successes of political satire, or the public display of skepticism in religious matters, are all ingredients of *demokratia* that for Hegel (though certainly not for Plato) represent early forms of existence of the “*independent . . . personhood* of the individual, of subjective freedom.”³³ Many of the city’s legal, economic, and cultural practices carry within them the dawning consciousness of a right to subjectivity. In themselves, though not yet for the agents engaged in them, these practices imply that there exists a specific legitimacy of the particular interest (or will) vis-à-vis the absolute legitimacy of the universal interest (or will). And it is precisely because of the potential implications (not least juridical ones) of these practices that they become targets of Plato’s denunciation.

From a logical point of view, Hegel explains Plato’s attitude as being based on twin premises: first, that singularity is the contradictory of universality, and second, that a self-contradictory whole is an unintelligible figure of thought. On the plane of political philosophy, Hegel thinks that these logical dogmas translate into Plato’s rejection of the possibility that singular or particular interests may imply and be implied by the universal interest of the whole.

Against these Platonic doctrines, Hegel claims to have proven in the *Logic* that singularity, particularity, and universality are not just compatible but rather integral “moments” of any unity that is organic. In the ethical sphere, this translates into the notion that the realization of free personhood lies precisely in its recognition by the state (“the principle of personhood is universality”), and, vice versa, that the state’s universality is “undeveloped” if it does not include the right of individuality. Hegel insists that grasping this notion is a historical achievement—which explains the concept’s absence from the Platonic *corpus*:

What is universal about the Concept . . . is what particularizes . . . itself remaining at home with itself in its other. . . . [I]n its true and comprehensive significance, the universal is a thought that took millennia to enter into men’s consciousness. The Greeks, although otherwise so highly cultivated, did not know God, or even man, in their true universality.³⁴

Mere Singularity: The Selfless Slave

The social acceptance and legal recognition of slavery in antiquity is one of its most striking features. In the rare occasions where justification is

felt to be in order, slavery is justified alternately as legitimate privilege of the master, as natural state of the slave, as unavoidable economic device, or as fulfilling all three functions at once—such as in the famous discussion in Aristotle’s *Politics*.³⁵ In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel attributes these justifications to a historical failure to grasp that the essence of being human is personhood or, in logical terms, that the essence of individuality is universality:

What the slave lacks is the recognition of his personhood; but the principle of personhood is universality. The master considers the slave not as a person, but as a selfless thing [*eine selbstlose Sache*]; and the slave himself does not count as an I, for the master is his I instead.³⁶

“*Sache*,” of course, is not to be read as “*Ding*.” The characterization of ancient conceptions of the slave as “selfless thing” must appear ludicrous if “thing” is understood as a lifeless object—or even as an *automaton*.³⁷ The same happens if “selfless” is taken to mean altogether “soulless.” Hegel is of course perfectly aware that even for the ancients, slaves are individual human beings. His point is that they are not recognized as persons. Their self is someone else’s. Though Hegel does not mention it, the most likely referent of his discussion of ancient conceptions of slavery is Book I of Aristotle’s *Politics*.³⁸ Aristotle distinguishes between *poietika organa* (means of production) and *praktika organa* (means for the improvement of life). The latter have souls, and the slave is one of these: *empsychon organon*. While he lacks a concept of personhood, Aristotle insists that the slave—not unlike the woman—has a soul, though one of a different kind as the master’s.

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel discusses slavery in the context of property acquisition, that is, of the embodiment of the will—the source of right—in external objects. He explains both the “asserted justification of slavery” and the opposite “assertion of [its] absolute injustice”³⁹ as theses of an “abstract” antinomy. Historically, thesis and antithesis are found in pristine form in Aristotle’s and in Rousseau’s work. One is embodied in Aristotle’s laconic definition: “[He] who is by nature not his own, but another’s man, is by nature a slave.”⁴⁰ The other is carved indelibly in Rousseau’s aphorism: “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”⁴¹ Hegel however thinks that the antinomy is only apparent, in that both thesis and antithesis regard “man” as a natural entity: either as naturally un-free, or as naturally free. The real antithesis to this common perspective, he argues, consists of grasping “man” (*der Mensch*) as referring to more than a bundle of natural capacities. “*Mensch*” denotes the capacity to sublate natural capacities:

Man, in conformity with his *immediate* existence, is in himself something natural, external to his concept. It is only through the *formation* [*Bildung*] of his own body and mind, *essentially* through his self-consciousness's apprehension of itself as free, that he takes possession of himself and becomes his own property over against others. This taking possession . . . is the positing into *actuality* of what he is according to his concept.⁴²

By contrast, the ancients still regard "man" as a creature of nature, a mere "*existence* . . . not adequate to its concept."⁴³ The problem with using humans as "tools for tools," as codified by Aristotle,⁴⁴ is not that such use is incompatible with biological nature but that it is incompatible with the spiritual (*geistig*) nature, that is, with the concept or truth of "man." Slavery is legitimated by custom and positive law at historical stages that precede man's grasp of his own concept: "This early, un-true phenomenon befalls spirit that has just attained the standpoint of its consciousness."⁴⁵ The new standpoint emerges late in the history of the species. Eventually, it brings about subjects who grasp and will themselves as free, and a political organism that enables and guarantees this knowledge and will:

[T]he dialectic of the Concept and of the at first only immediate consciousness of freedom brings about at that point *the fight of recognition* and the relation of *lordship* and *servitude*. . . . It is only in the knowledge that the Idea of freedom is actually true exclusively as *state* that objective spirit, the content of Right, is no longer taken in its subjective concept alone, and that thereby man's in-and-for-himself incompatibility with slavery is no longer taken as a mere *ought to be*.⁴⁶

Property as Mark of Subjection

Hegel discusses Plato's conception of property in the same context as slavery, namely in Abstract Right. Property is the first, most rudimentary form in which the will of individuals becomes objective to them, namely as embodied in things. By outlawing this "abstract" externalization of the will, Hegel argues, Plato aims at inhibiting the will's further development toward more "concrete" expressions. By denying the guardians personal property and familial privacy, Plato betrays a strong awareness

of the connection between abstract externalizations of the will and more concrete ones that might eventually subvert the established order:

The idea of the *Platonic* state contains as general principle a wrong against the person, namely its unfitness for private property. . . . [T]he proscription of the private property principle . . . fails to recognize the nature of spirit's freedom and of Right.⁴⁷

T. M. Knox has raised a pertinent objection against this Hegelian reading. Plato, he stresses, does not deprive everybody in the *kallipolis* of private property, but only the guardians. This is factually correct, but the objection ignores that Hegel's aim in this context is to identify in Plato's thinking conceptual precursors of modern notions of personhood or free citizenship.⁴⁸ The virtues of the guardians are those that most closely resemble the essential characteristics of a self-conscious and self-determining citizenry. They must be kept from involving themselves in the degrading activities of people who are farther removed from personhood—principally the activity of embodying one's "desire" (*to epithumetikon*, the Greek forerunner of "the will") in material possessions. In Plato's eyes, the apparent privileges enjoyed by the "money-makers"⁴⁹ of the third estate (to own, to accumulate and to trade currency and goods) are directly related to the poor quality of their souls and thus to their contemptible way of life. Holding property is a symptom of congenital powerlessness, that is, lack of self-control and thus of control of others. It marks permanent exclusion from power and is at best an indemnity for this exclusion. Plato is not alone in holding this judgment. In very different contexts, Demosthenes and Aristophanes present all who make money as servile natures or irredeemably contemptible *nouveau riches*.⁵⁰

In sum: while property in things is for Hegel a basic and elementary form of self-determination, for Plato it is the greatest obstacle to active citizenship. By denying the guardians the most elementary manifestation of their will, Hegel claims, Plato means to destroy in them the first awakening of free personhood.

It is important, however, to clearly understand that Hegel's criticism of Plato's suppression of a *right* to individual satisfaction of one's desires does not imply the claim that ancient individuals did not *in fact* seek such satisfaction. Hegel's point concerns the juridical, moral, and political recognition, not the psychological awareness of free individual will. This point is made evident in his interpretation of Greek conceptions of happiness and desire.

Happiness without Freedom, Desire without Will

Lecturing on Solon's sayings, Hegel points out that *eudaimonia*, introduced by Solon as lifelong, habitual satisfaction of human desire and opposed to short-lived enjoyment, must be understood as a first conceptualization of desire, that is, as universalization of desire's particularity and thus potentially as recognition of its ethical value: "Happiness as a state for the whole life, represents totality of enjoyment. This is something universal and a rule over single enjoyments . . . [a rule] to restrain desire, to have [a] universal standard before one's eyes."⁵¹

In the pre-classical age, *eudaimonia* refers to a condition due to the "good will of a *daimon*," typically a condition of material wealth that makes an overall positive attitude to life possible. Solon's *eudaimonia*, Hegel comments, is universal in form though not yet in content. It is a gift of fortune, not a deed of the will. Discussing an anecdote by Herodotus, Hegel comments that in Solon's conception of happiness "the form of universality is already present, but the universal does not yet emerge for itself."⁵² Solon recommends happiness over the gratification of single desires as a matter of prudence in the choice of means for ends (namely the choice of sacrificing pleasure in favor of long-term happiness). Neither freedom of the will nor a right to the satisfaction of one's desire are part of this picture.

Knox has written that "Hegel . . . held that subjective freedom never came within the Greek purview at all."⁵³ This may be overstating the case, but Plato's efforts in warding off expressions of subjective freedom are hardly mistakable. Although his term for freedom, *eleutheria* (literally "doing as one pleases") is closer to *Willkür* (*arbitrium*) than to *Wille* (*voluntas*), Plato's bitter caricature of life in *demokratia* speaks volumes about his assessment of this motive force of human action:

A democratic city, athirst for freedom, . . . praises and honors . . . rulers who behave like subjects and subjects who behave like rulers. . . . A father accustoms himself to behave like a child . . . while the son behaves like a father. . . . A resident alien or a foreign visitor is made equal to a citizen. . . . The utmost freedom for the majority is reached . . . when bought slaves, both male and female, are no less free than those who bought them. And I almost forgot to mention the extent of the legal equality of men and women and of the freedom in their relations.⁵⁴

This description (which continues to include bitter visions of democratic freedoms for dogs and asses) culminates in Plato's disparagement of a

citizenry “incapable” of enduring any kind of bondage (*douleia*): “citizens’ souls,” he chides, become “so sensitive” that “at the least degree of slavery they become angry and cannot endure it.”⁵⁵

In the last division of the *Philosophy of Right* (Ethical Life) Hegel contrasts the ancient reverence for order and harmony with the modern exaltation of choice and antagonism. He maintains that in modern civil society, “self-conscious” or “for itself” particularity perpetually asserts itself against the containing power of the state’s universality.⁵⁶ He adds that, if left unchecked, the self-assertion of particularity must produce centrifugal forces that undermine society itself. Hegel’s description of the internal dynamics of civil society shares both the Platonic disdain of the freedom of “the many” and the Rousseauian contempt for that of “the few.” He seems now very close to sharing Plato’s judgment on “democratic” freedom. This seeming self-contradiction is easily resolved when one realizes that for Hegel civil society is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for freedom: it is a “state of need and of the understanding” (*Not- und Verstandesstaat*),⁵⁷ not a state of reason (*Vernunft*). What Plato had feared is precisely “the excess, [the] misery, and the physical and ethical depravity common to them both”⁵⁸ that characterize a civil society become more powerful than its state. With realistic foreboding, the ancient philosopher dreads the proliferation of particularisms (mainly understood as the breeding of greed) in society, without being able to envisage its incorporation and containment by the state.

Hegel himself, of course, views the right to satisfy one’s subjective will only as a moment in the overall “progress in the consciousness of freedom”⁵⁹ that is spirit’s history—and yet it is a necessary moment and not, as in Plato, a mere destabilization of the community, a violation of justice, a threat to the subsistence of the whole:

The independent development of particularity . . . is the moment that appears in the states of antiquity as intruding corruption of the *ethos* and as the ultimate ground of their decline.⁶⁰ Thus, not being integrated in and unified with the organization of the whole, subjective particularity [in the *polis*] shows itself . . . as an enemy, as corruption of the social order.⁶¹

Ancient juridical, comic, and tragic literature offers a picture of the Greeks’ interest in and recognition of individual character, desire, and will that is quite different from that found in the works of the philosophers. While in tragedy individual characterization is limited (undoubtedly because of the exemplary role of its characters and the archaic setting of their deeds), comedy and oratory are keenly interested in the peculiarities

and eccentricities associated with gender, social position, age, or sexual proclivity of their characters. Nothing is sacred to comedy—especially not the moralistic typology embodied in the heroes and the heroines, the divine founders, the blameless mothers and virginal sisters, the lovers of Hellenic mankind, or the philosophers. Against these role models, comedy asserts the legitimacy of a cultural and political interest in individually sized bullies and opportunists, immoralists and philistines, superstitious fools and cunning atheists, rogues and their victims. Comedy's dislike of clichés is at its best (for example, in Aristophanes' *Knights*) when it parodies the politically all-powerful idea of divine intervention in human affairs. Menander's audiences laugh at official religious beliefs and practices: a citizen whose enemy has fallen into a well cries in relief "There are gods, by Dionysus!"⁶² Surviving fragments of literary works testify to ethical ideas and attitudes stunningly divergent from what we find in philosophers' works. A fragment by Antiphanes, for example, contains the extraordinary thought that the educated man forgoes retaliation when wronged and is motivated by compassion in all circumstances.⁶³

Hegel is familiar with this larger picture. He does not allege that ancient *ethos* altogether ignores the existence of individual desire and will. His argument is rather that ancient philosophers intuit the potential development of individual subjectivity from its mere status as fact to that of a claim to recognition, eventually attaining the new status of a universal *right* to it. Despite his unabashed admiration of classical antiquity, Hegel's ultimate pronouncement on the form of consciousness upon which all ancient civilizations rest is stern:

These states . . . could not endure in themselves the diremption [of their ethical life]. They succumbed to this reflection, as it began to appear first in mental disposition and then in actuality . . . *Plato* . . . does present substantial ethicality in its ideal *beauty* and *truth*; but he is incapable of dealing with the principle of independent particularity, which in his time had penetrated Greek ethical life, otherwise than by opposing to it his merely substantial state and . . . by excluding it altogether [from the latter].⁶⁴

Lest the appearance of a "principle of independent particularity" in history be understood only as cultural manifestation of an immaterially conceived "spirit," one must point out that this aspect of spirit's transition "from substance to subject" is also intended as a material historical development. One need only to read an often neglected passage from the *Philosophy of Right's* section on the State.⁶⁵ Here, Hegel discerns the

transition in the historical novelty of requiring that work be mediated through individual's own volition. Labor, in other words, becomes a means to further particular subjective ends. Besides being motivated by raw necessity and in accordance with another's will, individual labor is increasingly seen as personal possession (much like one's body, talents, religious belief or inclinations), thus as an activity performed "voluntarily." In a surprising comment, Hegel specifies that the recognition of the right to one's work and thus in the end to one's will arises thanks to ("is made possible by") the practice of paying for services, not with goods, but in form of a quantitatively equivalent "universal value"—that is, in form of money:

In *Plato's* state the rulers are left to assign individuals to their particular stands and to impose on them their *particular* tasks. . . . [I]n the feudal monarchy vassals had to carry out equally undetermined services . . . in their *particularity*. . . . What is missing in these contexts is the principle of *subjective freedom*, namely that the substantial activity of the individual . . . be mediated through his *particular will*—a right made possible only by the requirement that services be provided in form of universal value.⁶⁶

The material side of the mediation in modern social orders is represented by the exchange of wages (in universal currency) for work. Wages represent the universal abstract equivalence of particular, qualitatively different kinds of work.⁶⁷ Through this sober mechanism, individual volition or interest begins to be integrated in the general will or interest while being recognized by the latter. This, Hegel notes, is the most striking feature of civil society—the realization of freedom in its utterly abstract dimension: "The egoistic end in its actualization, conditioned in this way by the universality—grounds a system of all-round dependency."⁶⁸

In the Greek world, it is the Sophistic movement that stands out as forceful manifestation of an emerging right to individual interest—not surprisingly, also by claiming material compensation for intellectual labor. Rather than conceiving the true and the good as objective, preordained goals, the Sophists consider them as results of competent argument, acquired skill or—more scandalously still—personal conviction. This is why Plato views sophistry as spearheading the internal corrosion of a harmonious society of peacefully coexisting, mutually segregated estates.

For Hegel, human history is the development of the Idea itself, and an integral part (or logically necessary moment) of its substance is

individuals' right to their particularity. Indeed, he writes, "[P]articularity is the externally appearing mode in which the ethical exists."⁶⁹ Thus, neither particular aspirations to it nor its eventual juridical establishment could be banned from history: "If Plato's state wanted to exclude particularity, it could not be helped, since such help would contradict the infinite right of the Idea to let particularity be free."⁷⁰

By historical as much as logical necessity, an epochal revolution would come about through which subjective particularity would attain universal recognition. The price that antiquity paid for the suppression of this development was its own dissolution.

Notes

This chapter is a revised version of two sections of chapter 5 of my *Subjects in the Ancient and Modern World. On Hegel's Theory of Subjectivity* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005). These passages are reproduced with permission of Palgrave-Macmillan.

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1820), *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 7 (W 7), §106.

2. W 7, §152, Remark.

3. A. Peperzak, *Selbsterkenntnis des Absoluten: Grundlinien der Hegelschen Philosophie des Geistes* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987); and B. Tuschling, "Die Idee in Hegel's Philosophie des Subjektiven Geistes," in *Psychologie und Anthropologie oder Philosophie des Geistes*, ed. F. Hespe and B. Tuschling (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991). For Hegel's own statements, see among others the Introduction to the Philosophy of Spirit, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften* 1830 (Enz.), §377 and the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (W 12), discussed below.

4. W 12, 272.

5. Enz. §377.

6. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik. Lehre des Seins* (1832); *Gesammelte Werke* (GW), Vol. 21 (Hamburg: 1968), 15–16.

7. W 12, 271 ff.

8. "What walks on four legs in the morning, on two at midday, on three at nightfall?" Oedipus's answer: "It is man."

9. I use translation by T. M. Knox and A. V. Miller, *G. W. F. Hegel. Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 75, except for replacing "law" with "Right" for Hegel's *Recht*.

10. W 12, 272.

11. Enz., §160, Addition.

12. Ibid., § 216, Addition.

13. *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (W 3), 589.

14. In W 7, §121 the "right of the subject to find its satisfaction in the action" is defined as "the more concrete determination" of "subjective freedom,"

which in turn consists of the fact that “the *particularity* of the agent is contained and implemented in the action.”

15. *W* 7, §124, Remark.

16. Even Allan Bloom, in *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), seems to consider Plato’s argumentative strategy in this case baffling. He both stresses the fundamental role of the parallelism in the overall argument of the *Republic* (344) and admits that the book contains no satisfactory justification for it: “A city, like a man, desires wealth, needs food, and deliberates. But a city cannot reproduce or philosophize. . . . In this sense a city cannot be properly compared to a man” (376).

17. See *Republic* 368d-369, 434d-435b, and 435c-436. At 368e Socrates argues that, since “a city is larger than a single man . . . perhaps . . . there is more justice in the larger thing, and it will be easier to learn what it is.” At 435e we learn that “[i]t would be ridiculous for anyone to think that spiritedness didn’t come to be in cities from such individuals as the Thracians, Scythians, and others who live to the north of us . . . or that the same isn’t true of the love of learning, which is mostly associated with our part of the world, or the love of money which . . . is conspicuously displayed by the Phoenicians and Egyptians.” The quotations are from Grube’s and Reeve’s translation in J. M. Cooper, ed., *Plato. Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

18. *GW* 18, 48.

19. *W* 7, 26.

20. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. W. Wood, trans., H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

21. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, ed. and trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952).

22. *W* 7, 24.

23. *Republic* 431e-432.

24. *Enz.*, §114.

25. See in particular: A. Fuks, “Plato and the Social Question: The Problem of Poverty and Riches in the *Republic*,” *Ancient Society* 8 (1977): 49–83; M. H. Jameson, “Agriculture and Slavery in Classical Athens,” *Classical Journal* 73 (1977–78): 122–45; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981). De Ste Croix (p. 70) refers approvingly to Fuks’s talk of Plato’s “obsessive conviction” that “the tense political atmosphere and acute civil strife of his day were the direct consequence of increasing contrasts between wealth and poverty. In particular Plato realized that an oligarchy . . . will actually be two cities, one of the poor and the other of the rich, ‘always plotting against each other’([*Republic*] 551d).”

26. *Republic*, 555d.

27. *Ibid.* 565–57.

28. *Ibid.*, 414c-d.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *W* 7, §206, Remark.

31. *Ibid.*, §299, Remark.

32. *Ibid.*, §206, Remark.

33. Ibid., §185, Remark.
34. *Enz.*, §163, Addition 1.
35. Aristotle's discussion is a partial endorsement of all three. See *Politics*, Book I, chapter 4, and Book III, chapter 6.
36. *Enz.*, §163, Addition 1.
37. For "Sache" vs. "Ding" see M. Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 288 ff.
38. Especially 1253b 1 ff.
39. *W* 7, §57, Remark.
40. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254a 15.
41. J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I, chapter 1.
42. *W* 7, §57.
43. Ibid., Remark.
44. *Politics*, 1253b 30.
45. *W* 7, §57, Remark.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., §46, Remark.
48. Furthermore, in the *Laws* Plato does extend the prohibition to the whole. See *Laws* V, 739c-e.
49. *Republic*, 434c.
50. For textual examples see J. K. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 170 ff.; V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes* (Oxford: 1951); F. Egerman, *Vom attischen Menschenbild* (Munich: 1952).
51. Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, *W* 18, 186–87.
52. *W* 18, 187. Hegel refers as well to Herodotus's story of an encounter between Solon and Croesus in *W* 7, §123, Remark.
53. Knox 1952, 339.
54. *Republic*, 562d-563b .
55. Ibid., 563c-d.
56. *W* 7, §185.
57. Ibid., §183.
58. Ibid., §185.
59. *W* 12, 32.
60. *W* 7, §185, Remark.
61. Ibid., §206, Remark.
62. Cited in Dover 1974, 20.
63. Antiphanes' fragment is quoted in Dover 1974, 20. Dover notes that this passage, lacking any context, may as well have been meant sarcastically. The expression "well [*alethes*] educated" may have read "guileless [*euethes*]." Still, even then the fragment testifies to the awareness, on Antiphanes' part and thus of his audiences, of highly unusual, un-Greek, "singular" conceptions of the good.
64. *W* 7, §185, Remark.
65. Ibid., §299.
66. Ibid., Remark. The Addition further illustrates this notion.

67. For Hegel's determination of the nature of money see *W 7*, §63, Addition.

68. *W 7*, §183.

69. *Ibid.*, §154.

70. See *W 7*, §185 Addition.

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The Historicity of Ethical Categories

The Dynamic of Moral Imputation in Hegel's Account of History

Jason Howard

I

History may be moved by many things in Hegel, but few would single out ethical obligations as a core contributing factor. I propose to reconsider this assumption by examining the role of moral imputation in Hegel's conception of historical progress, and by "moral imputation" I mean, very briefly, those experiences whereby agents confront their own culpability.¹ I believe taking up this issue will help answer two important questions. First, in what sense do ethical obligations "move" history? Second, in what sense can these obligations have any substantial ethical import if they are destined to change as the historical actuality of self-conscious communities alter? Simply put: Are ethical commitments of only instrumental worth for Hegel, stepping stones of ancillary value through which history reveals its own absolute telos, or are they something more, and if so, what could this "more" signify? What does Hegel mean in his lectures on history when he says that world history "occupies a higher ground" (*VpG*, 67/90) than that of morality, yet also insists at the same time that "the responsibility and moral value of the individual [*Schuld und Wert des Individuums*], remains untouched," and is shut away from the clamor of history (*VpG*, 37/54).² One of the first things that needs to be clarified here is the extent to which ethical obligations are an inevitable aspect of our historicity. This chapter addresses this issue by demonstrating how Hegel balances the necessity

of self-discovery as the true medium of history with the experience of moral imputation. Clarifying this issue will not solve all of the difficulties that beset Hegel's providential union of moral progress and history, but I believe it will illuminate to what extent issues of accountability serve as the unique fulcrum of spiritual self-discovery.

To understand the role of moral imputation is to appreciate its living warrant as the pivotal anchor of cultural existence. What interests me here is the way the manifold ethical obligations that cement self-conscious existence also serve as that vehicle through which the concerns of singular agents "crash" up against larger, and often competing, cultural norms, forcing the limitations of the historical warrants that govern agents' self-interpretation into the open. It is these experiences that question the viability of our own sense of identity and serve as the individual locus through which the various worlds of spiritual actuality, whether Oriental, ancient Greek, Roman, or German, are experienced firsthand in their existential disintegration.

Ethical concerns and commitments work to anchor our relationships to one another, which make accessible our common aspirations as historical subjects. They serve as the personal expression of the purposefulness that underwrites our existence, which also means they articulate how we recognize ourselves and what is important to us. How we evaluate our duties, then, is also a reflection of how we evaluate ourselves, because if it turns out that nothing substantial is at stake in our engagements with the world, so too there is nothing at stake in being a subject. What makes these concerns so central rests with the fact that the peculiar reality of these obligations, more than any other single experience, shows self-conscious agents the limitations and achievements of their own personal existence, embodying together the gamut of epistemological and metaphysical issues that show the character of an age in its most visceral expression. Ethical duties show, as Lewis Hinchman explains, how our identities are implicated in the desires and choices we pursue, along with the stances we take toward them.³ It is this friction, then, between the legitimacy of our duties to the norms of our culture and the burgeoning demands of our own singularity, that forces self-consciousness beyond the security of its various historical worlds. As Hegel attests in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*:

This is the seal of the absolute and sublime destiny (*Bestimmung*) of man—that he knows what is good and what is evil; that his destiny *is* his very ability to will either good or evil—in one word, that he is the subject of moral imputation [*daß er Schuld haben kann*], imputation not only of evil,

but of good; and not only concerning this or that particular matter, and all that happens *ab extrá*, but *also* the good and evil attaching to his individual [*individuellen*] freedom. (*VpG*, 34/50–51)

In order to understand how our historical destiny is anchored in the unavoidable reality of moral imputation it is not enough to look at the rise of morality as an explicit institution and way of life, or the prevalence of conscience as the defining attribute of our modern spirituality, or even the struggle of the master and slave dialectic; rather, one must also indicate the extent to which the experience of moral imputation is the specifying matrix of all historical communities, whether explicit or not.⁴ This entails examining the unique role that moral imputation plays in the dynamic of historical progress, which draws agents into the multiple demands of mutual self-determination. And let me clarify once again that by moral imputation I mean, as Hegel indicates above, the capacity to feel implicated at the deepest levels of our identity—to experience the individuating anguish of guilt—and so become conscious of our accountability to all those actions and duties that promote both good and evil. As Hegel clarifies elsewhere: “An ethical state of humanity begins only with a state of accountability or a capacity for guilt . . . to have guilt means to be accountable, that this is one’s knowledge and one’s will, that one does it as what is right.”⁵ As I see it, focusing on the experience of moral imputation as the historical expression of a culture will help address not only how the capacity for guilt propels the world spirit toward unveiling freedom as “the fundamental object of history” (*VpG*, 55/76), but also aid in clarifying the unique character ethical obligations have for Hegel.

In order to make my discussion as specific as possible I turn my exegesis to the *Phenomenology* and concentrate on two distinct modes of spiritual qua historical existence, that of ancient Greece (ch. VI, A), and the rise of European culture, whose historical purview stretches roughly from the fall of the Roman Empire to the French Revolution (ch. VI, B).⁶ I appreciate that the role of history and the way it is depicted in the *Phenomenology* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* is a debate in itself. Suffice it to say that I do not see these two texts in any serious contradiction but rather—following interpretations such as Goldstein—as mutually complementary, with each offering a “retrospective reconstruction of the development of *Geist*” toward freedom, but emphasizing different vantage points.⁷ My present objective in turning to the *Phenomenology* is to supplement the view of moral imputation Hegel repeatedly touches on in his lectures on history, with a more detailed

description whose focus is not simply the state but also the underlying duties that moor the state as a determinate kind of cultural existence. Moreover, I believe the scope as well as the necessity of this moral dynamic of disintegration and transformation can be seen most clearly in the struggles of ancient Greece and developing Europe to contend with the reality of individual accountability.⁸ And so, far from contradicting his later orientation in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, I believe the *Phenomenology* specifies a level of normative experience and perspective that Hegel valued throughout his career, and which is necessary to appreciate the full scope of his account of history.

Before turning to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, I want to offer a few brief clarifying remarks on how the notion of moral imputation, or what Hegel calls *Schuld* or *böse Gewissen*, operates in Hegel's texts.⁹ As Hegel states much earlier in his *System of Ethical Life*, the experience of guilt refers to an "inner negation."¹⁰ It surfaces from the defiance of a commandment whose violation brings the subject immediately into conflict with the sources of his or her own objective existence. The sense of guilt arises on behalf of an outer negation, an actual defilement of the "real" as it exists in the norms of culture. The objective negation then returns as an inward negation of the subject. In the *System of Ethical Life* Hegel describes this moment of inner negation as the implicit arrival of freedom insofar as negativity appears here in its transformation from real negation to "ideal" negation, or negativity as a mode of thinking. I want to describe how this individual experience of negativity disrupts both the security of Greek ethical life, as well as the boundless confidence of Enlightenment rationality. It is important to realize at the outset that what I propose to chart, the experience of moral imputation, is experienced in different ways by agents depending on the historical world they dwell within. The most substantial distinction is that between objective and subjective guilt. The objective experience of guilt is defined by the virtual absence of any rationalizing role for subjective intentions—that one's fate is determined *tout court* by the will of the Gods or the state. The subjective sense of guilt, which is the modern sense of guilt we are familiar with, locates the experience of guilt solely at the level of subjective intentions and the personal knowledge of one's circumstances.¹¹ As our discussion of Antigone in Ancient Greece and the perils of the French Revolution will make clear, although the experience of guilt is expressed differently depending on what historical world we examine, its relevancy for the consciousness of freedom as historical self-determination is indispensable, and the most visceral way in which agents come to realize the implications of their own singular individuality. Quoting Stephen Houlgate: "History is thus the process whereby human beings come

to new levels of awareness of their freedom, of their productive, active nature, and thereby produce new forms of social and political life.”¹² The argument I develop here is that these “levels of awareness” would be largely meaningless if they did not emerge from a confrontation at the level of personal accountability.

II

Hegel begins his analysis of spirit in the *Phenomenology* with the historical word of the ancient Greek city-state.¹³ The significant aspect to note here is how ethical life rests upon and reaches actualization through natural characteristics; for example, age, character, and most significantly gender. These natural distinctions are endowed with a sense that is directly related to the larger organization of social/ethical existence, the intelligibility of which is seen as an extension of the larger cosmos and the natural order intrinsic to it.¹⁴

What is being examined here, as Hegel points out, is not the subjective consciousness of singular agents per se, but the constitutive elements that determine the “meaning” of one’s existence as this is forged in the inseparable binds of intersubjective (living) communities, or self-consciousness in general: “Absolute spirit realized in the plurality of distinct consciousnesses definitely existing” (*PhG*, 466/292). The first thing to recognize at this level of natural ethical life is that issues of moral adjudication rarely, if ever, reach explicit thematization. However, it would be a serious mistake to assume from this lack of thematization that moral concerns are absent. Rather, these concerns are embedded in one’s social identity, shaping the certainty of one’s existence as cultural agent (*PhG*, 467/293).¹⁵

Natural ethical life flourishes through the continued interaction of the “family” and the “state” as organizations of one social totality. Although it is true that each sphere has its own priorities and purposes, the first being the exclusive preserve of women and the other that of men, these spheres do not exist in separation but as two facets of the same world that “confirm” and “substantiate” one another (*PhG*, 481/303). The state subsists on behalf of members who knowingly participate in all the concerns of objective social organization (the sphere of human law), while the life of the family persists through the folk wisdom of familial traditions handed down from generation to generation (the sphere of divine law).

These two spheres of human and divine law work to ground the meaning or point of all natural differences through stipulating, in two

elemental ways, what these differences mean for beings who also think the difference and do not just live it.¹⁶ As Hegel specifies, these natural determinations supply the “operative individuality” (*betätigenden Individualität*), while the “universal actuality” (*allgemeinen Wirklichkeit*) of this individuality is lived in the duties of nation and family (*PhG*, 479/302). As a result, the ethical concerns that underwrite ancient Greece are never explicit as distinct moral obligations since cultural existence is itself a totality of harmonious norms whose index runs so deep its vehicle is biological facticity itself. Consequently, reflection on these norms is not only superfluous, but would be construed as sacrilegious.

In their allegiance to human and divine laws, the state and the family rely on subjects in different ways. The real difficulty lies in the fact that each recognizes the duties of individual agency in only *one* way, which prohibits any robust notion of a mediated social identity from being fulfilled within the day to day concerns of cultural existence. The fault does not lie with either the family or the state, but the identity of both as a single functioning world: each recognizes singular agents in different ways, one as an explicit vehicle of universality, while the other as the preserve of individual agency through familial piety. It is when human beings seek to negotiate or mediate the demands of both spheres to accommodate their own experience as singular agents, their existence as either this man or this woman, that irreconcilable difficulties emerge. As Wilfried Goossens puts it, with natural ethical life we have two forms of self-consciousness (man and woman) that determine themselves according to only one facet of their substantiality, and so “not only the knowledge of but also the ignorance of a part of their own substance (the other law),” is embodied in each which creates the conditions for a “fatal internal contradiction.”¹⁷

In order to press home his point about the potential problem of (natural) attribution and social organization, Hegel turns to the classic tale of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. As a woman, Antigone must venerate her brother’s death to fulfill the customs of the family, for as keeper of the familial order she recognizes that the death of her brother demands acknowledgment. However, in Antigone’s case such action is prohibited by the state, the law of men, since her brother is seen as a traitor to the state; consequently, his body is to be left unburied as a sign of his transgression. What, then, is Antigone to do? Her identity as woman demands she do her duty and bury her brother. To refuse would be to relinquish the intelligibility of her own identity, since as woman her gender transcribes her into an order that directly supervenes upon the truth of whom she recognizes herself to be. This has the effect of forcing the simple immediacy of her duty as woman, the truth of her essential

identity, into question through placing her act in contradiction with the larger universality from which she coordinates her actions (the law of the state). In the natural ethical life of ancient Greece, one lives the certitude of ethical duties as the reality of social existence, enacting it as determining principle of one's experience.¹⁸ By following one course of action, Antigone rejects the authority of the law of men, excommunicating herself from the recognition accorded those who participate within a single cultural world of human community and commerce. It is from out of this disjunction that Antigone is paralyzed from all social interaction via the experience of guilt, whereby her sense of self becomes severed from her familial duties. Yet what, one might ask, is Antigone guilty of, and what bearing does it have on the disintegration of ancient Greece?

One must fulfill the law of their respective spheres. To decline this duty would be to deny the intelligibility of one's identity. The demands the institutions of state and family dictate are transcribed, as it were, into the very meaning of self-conscious existence. In seeking to fulfill the rights of one sphere, irrespective of the other, the opposition between consciousness (the known) and *self*-consciousness (the ignorance of our own singularity) surfaces for the first time through the experience of guilt. No amount of knowledge or foresight could prevent the impending transgression from happening, because it concerns two distinct ways of enacting one's duties that miss the implications of their own historical instantiation as facets of a *single* world.

Hegel explains that by her deed Antigone becomes guilty (*PhG*, 488/308). The moment she acts on the knowledge of her duty, Antigone is forced outside the security of her own identity as female agency. This occurs through the simple act of fulfilling her role, which differentiates the consciousness of her own singularity from the certainty of herself as an ethical being. In so doing Antigone, as Hegel puts it, "gives up the specific quality of the ethical life" and initiates its division (*PhG*, 488/308). Antigone epitomizes an experience that unveils the paradoxical nature of self-consciousness as *infinite negativity*: that the truth of experience is inseparable from the activity of determining (negating) facets of one's existence. Hegel defines the inward realization of this paradoxical condition as guilt (*Schuld*). This experience of guilt signals the arrival of self-conscious agency "for itself." The choice to act "is itself this splitting [*Entzweiung*], this explicit self-affirmation and the establishing over against itself of an alien external reality" (*PhG*, 488/308). Antigone experiences this truth at the deepest levels of her identity, but she, like all the agents of natural ethical life, is unable to articulate its significance for her own unique sense of selfhood, and so she grasps it as the inevitable consequence of fate.

If my reading of Hegel on this point is correct, Antigone's experience of guilt expresses one, if not the most, of the primordial ways that human beings realize the depth of their own identity as self-determining agents. It is an experience that disrupts not only our relation to independent others, but is primarily, as Robert Williams says of Hegel's concept of the "other," an "othering of self," an experience of self-estrangement.¹⁹ Antigone does not appear guilty in the modern sense of the word, since she is *compelled* to fulfill the divine law—she experiences what Hegel calls "objective guilt"—yet this by no means detracts from what can rightly be called the ethical wisdom of Hegel's point. What we should note here is the nature of this compulsion itself and the way it forces agents to confront what it means to be implicated in the experience of a common world. In looking at the experience of guilt in the natural ethical life of Ancient Greece, Hegel is demonstrating how agents are imputed beyond their immediate beliefs in recognizing a world that is no longer experienced as simply the natural extension of their own values, yet one that agents are powerless to disown. It is this problem in particular that unseats the security of natural ethical life, for the certitude that anchors one's sense of duty precludes its elucidation, every attempt at which must be seen as a betrayal of the trust that substantiates one's social existence. In taking this angle, Hegel specifies with some precision one fundamental way in which self-conscious agents inevitably come to confront the duties imposed upon them as specific agents.

As Hegel goes on to clarify, the moment of guilt signals the rise of the unconscious (*Unbewusste*) in the shape of one's own ineradicable singularity, which is the incarnation of the "possible." "The deed consists in setting in motion what was unmoved, and in bringing to light what was shut up as mere possibility [*Möglichkeit*] . . . linking on the unconscious to the conscious" (*PbG*, 490/309).²⁰ This experience of the possible is the education of self-conscious agency, which is an inevitable aspect of our existence as social/historical beings, and it is through this education that we confront our own contingency as singular entities. Hegel's analysis of guilt demonstrates how the reality of freedom is inescapable, since self-consciousness can at best only postpone, but never wholly avoid, the weight of its own interiority—that in this initial awareness of our own activity, however vague, is also concealed the "possible" as a category of actuality. What the possible signifies at this point, however, is only the *difference* between the knowledge of our ethical identity—what our duties consist in as subjects of a certain culture—and our inability to actualize such demands despite their intuitive certainty. Seen from this vantage point, what makes guilt such a pivotal moment in the experience of singularization so central to the

historical odyssey of self-consciousness, is the way it forces agents to confront the contribution of their own ineradicable presence as living subjects.

At the historical level in discussion here singularity has no substantial place, which threatens to leave those guilty of action traumatized by their own difference. And so although it is true that guilt centers out singular consciousness, this experience only serves to intimate the insubstantiality and indeterminacy of one's own self-identity. Within the historical reality of natural ethical life the actuality of freedom is as indeterminate as the sense of one's *own* singularity, yet it is guilt that opens the experiential space for such self-discovery. The rise of guilt dissolves the determinate identity of natural ethical life because the fact that we are "self-conscious" is given inadequate confirmation, which acts to occlude our common identity in equating natural indeterminateness with conscious determinations. This experience signals the transition beyond natural ethical life, for the attempt to restrict the meaning of spiritual (conscious) existence to a natural (contingent) determination, such as being a man or woman, leads to a restriction of the possibilities we are endowed with as self-conscious agents. The experience of guilt indicates that we cannot ground the articulation of our duties on the indifferent determinations of nature, because these determinations cannot bear the weight of the social experiences they are called upon to substantiate. With this the act of knowing is differentiated from its determinate source as immediate substance, initiating the transition of self-consciousness beyond its natural factuality. What's more, this event is rightly experienced as traumatic insofar as it is the effort to fix a difference that agents lack the means to articulate given the conceptual resources at their disposal.

What Antigone's act brings about is the negation of the harmony that underscores natural ethical life, which resurfaces as an ideal negation of her self-identity as guardian of the hearth. Although the "objective experience" of guilt exemplified by Antigone does not literally bring about the immediate collapse of the ancient Greek city-state, it points to the spirit of "subjective freedom" that will be its final downfall.²¹ What postpones its collapse is only the impeding reality of war for the Greek city-states, which forces self-conscious agents back into the realm of universality proper, thereby effectively "suppressing the spirit of individualism" (*Unterdrückung dieses Geistes der Einzelheit*) and returning it to its "natural" cycle (*PbG*, 497/314). Yet even the reality of war can only postpone the consciousness of a more subjective sense of freedom from taking hold, one whose ambiguous sense is conveyed most directly for the agents of Ancient Greece as the estranging experience of guilt.

III

An intrinsic sense of duty underscored the world of natural ethical life, yet there was no explicit concept of bad per se; wrongful action was simply any action that hindered the fulfillment of one's immediate obligations. With the world of culture, which Hegel designates in the *Phenomenology* as the spread of Christendom throughout Western Europe and the rise of the Enlightenment, the distinction between good and bad is brought into the open, as is the role singular agents play in sustaining this distinction. In calling this phase of existence "culture" (*Bildung*), Hegel is drawing our attention to the growing objectification of the natural world through the projects of self-consciousness. I want to look at how this process of objectification affects both the way agents make sense of the various duties placed upon them, as well as how it anchors their own sense of culpability.²²

It is only when the immediacy of natural ethical life is broken down, making its customs objectively distinct, that agents can first address these customs as something truthful to experience or not. To be sure, the defining issue of the European cultural experience is the way it rearticulates the nature of self-conscious existence, which is something that occurs most viscerally at the level of normative concepts of duty. These norms anchor the meaning of cultural experience for self-conscious agents in stipulating the binary opposition that exists between good and bad, which "stands as the absolute basis of all their action, where all their action securely subsists" (*es bleibt die absolute Grundlage und Bestehen alles ihres Tuns*) (*PhG*, 520/328). It is with the emancipation of self-consciousness away from the harmony of the natural world, that terms such as "good" and "bad," "right" and "wrong," finally become explicit as concepts. Yet the more the value of these norms is fixed as specific duties the more they become divested of their conceptual warrants—their certainty—as they become increasingly identified with the trends and ambitions of the time.

The moral experience of early feudal Europe unfolds as ethical distinctions gradually begin to intermingle, erasing the rigidity that defines them, pushing apart cognitive warrants and practical actuality—distinguishing the true from the good—while bringing the symbols of good and bad closer together.²³ In this gradual inversion, the norms that govern dutiful conduct become dependent on various media of culture, such as service and wealth, to determine the meaning of right and wrong.²⁴ Good and bad eventually lose their function as substantial modes of self-reflection or self-certainty, verifying what is inherently "right" from

what is definitely “wrong,” but come to exist merely as predicates that stand outside the life of self-conscious subjects (*PhG*, 526/332).

In this “transfusion” of values self-conscious agents experience the very purpose of life as eroding away, only to be replaced by an abstract system of regulative exchange. In reflecting upon its predicament and the meaning of its “own” existence in culture, Hegel states that consciousness confronts an “abyss” (*Abgründe*) in which “every solid base and stay [*Halt*] has vanished,” forsaking “all true spiritual import” (*sein Geist ist die ganz wesenlose Meinung, die geistverlassne Oberfläche zu sein*) (*PhG*, 539/342). It is here that human existence loses its sense of meaningfulness, seeing the source of all commitments has been completely ceded to the sphere of chance and contingency (the domain of wealth). This inversion marks the dissolution of dutiful agency into the indifference of pure universality, in which “self-existence is cut-off from essential being” (*PhG*, 546/347). What is acknowledged here is our own lack of obligation and purpose; our indifference to everything is taken as the genuine reflection of our own identity, having no positive or substantial ties to either the ideals of culture or the envining world such ideals circumscribe (*PhG*, 547/348). It is here, from this state of moral abandonment, that self-consciousness finally recognizes its “pure self” (*das reine Ich selbst*)—that consciousness is only the activity of self-movement, which is equally nothing determinate. With this recognition, self-conscious agents come to see their identity not in the substantiality of their own commitments, but the power of pure thought itself. Rather than outline the details of this intricate process, I want to focus on its final cultural result, that of the French Revolution. This final expression of spiritual revolt results from incorporating the infinite confidence of religious belief into the limitless powers of the Enlightenment project (pure insight), transforming the certainty of belief into the drive of political autonomy.²⁵ Thus, the cultural education of Western Europe comes to a close in the revolution (*Umwälzung*) of political self-definition (*PhG*, 600/385), where the abstract power of thought becomes an actual form of existence.²⁶

The move to actualize the freedom of pure thought in the world of culture, the final example of which is the terror of the French Revolution, is the move to re-forged cultural existence in the ideal image of what consciousness knows itself to be.²⁷ In so doing, self-consciousness sees the concept of utility as the practical truth of its own universality—that everything gains its value vis-à-vis the uses self-conscious agents can put it to in order to enhance their own projects. The implicit difficulty here is that such a criterion runs into serious problems when it comes

to justifying projects in any other way than appealing to what *appears* useful at any given moment. On account of this, the universal project of political self-definition is also rife with indeterminacy, lacking the means to concretely differentiate itself and its “vision” of the future from other versions of political autonomy. Given that the universal will to secure freedom as the absolute truth of existence has no way of determining or evaluating life-goals outside what appears applicable to agents *at any given time*, this universal will itself collapses into factions (*Faktion*), all of which want to instill their particular version of governance. As Hegel explains, in seeking to subjugate all singular wills to one particular purpose, the once-universal will toward freedom epitomized in the Enlightenment project becomes dismantled, placing the ideal of freedom explicitly on one side, and the citizens its seeks to govern on the other. This event occasions the arrival of “guilt” (*Schuld*).²⁸

To say the universal will to self-definition becomes guilty is to say that the members who compose it inevitably find themselves united by a specific interest, and no longer the desire to preserve the freedom of all. As Hegel explains: “The victorious faction only is called the government; and just in that it is a faction lies the direct necessity of its overthrow; and its being government makes it, conversely, into a faction and hence guilty” (*PhG*, 606/390). Once again, what I want to draw your attention to is how Hegel’s description of the rise of Enlightenment Europe and its final culmination, the French Revolution, works to reveal the way the vernacular of accountability itself is shaped in modern Europe, and its eventual reification. In the event of the French Revolution it is our particularity itself that eventually becomes suspect. This is true both of those self-conscious agents who manage to come to power, since their faction is potentially just another form of tyranny, as well as those who are not presently in power, since their intention to subversion can never be ruled out. Rather than risk intentions (*Absichten*) becoming objective, dominant members of the ruling faction seek to nullify the only thing left, “this particular existent self,” in other words, personal existence in general (*PhG*, 606/391).

With this “real” negation of itself, consciousness finally awakens to what the motivating power was behind the pure I and its universal will, which is a retreat from the mortality of existence by wholly negating the “meaning” of this existence in its singular significance.²⁹ The impending reality of death awakens self-consciousness to the realization that its absolute freedom as pure universal determination—pure will—is intimately connected to its existence as a singular being, and that they “ought” never to be separated.³⁰

What I hope to have made clear, is how the culmination of the French Revolution is inseparable from the experience of moral aban-

donment that began with the disintegration of feudal Europe in the ascendancy of wealth, and whose realization at the guillotine expresses the final attempt to reduce self-conscious agency to a mere “thing.” It is this “experience” of thinghood—a life without possibility, neither of denial nor affirmation—that instigates the revolt of self-conscious agency to reclaim its existence *for itself*. The peculiar catalyst for this realization is the rampant emergence of guilt, wherein agents are indicted merely because of the possibilities they embody as subjects. The subjective reality of an agent’s inner intentions is treated as objective proof that each is a potential traitor. And so although subjective guilt was recognized in the historical world of the French Revolution, it was granted no independent status in assessing one’s moral worth; rather, the fact one always has specific intentions served to cast doubt on all agents, placing them under a suspicion they could never be redeemed from. It is from the depths of this realization that “the vacuous negativity of self . . . turns round into absolute positivity” (*PbG*, 609/393), which sequences the transition to morality proper. With this move the indispensable importance of subjective guilt takes on unprecedented positive significance (the explanatory priority of personal intentions must be respected), signaling the rise of the modern conscience—“spirit certain of itself”—as the culminating experience of modernity.

In being unable to articulate any durable notion of accountability, the agents of the French Revolution come to experience their existence as mere things, a renewable resource like any other. The native limits of natural existence are traded for the limitless determinability of thought, and in so doing the substantial commitments that once defined the worth of human agency are relinquished for abstract truths. What’s more, it should come as no surprise that this failure is experienced most concretely in the moral abandonment that follows from the subjectification of *all* nature to pure utility. Accordingly, the real problem with the European world of culture is not that self-consciousness is unsuccessful in educating itself about the world, but that it proves unable to think itself as part of this world in any deep way.

IV

It is the experience of moral imputation that points to the limitations of both the natural ethical life of the Greek city-state and the abstract character of Enlightenment Europe. In each case, it is the reality of our own unique efforts that is ignored, which arises in the attempt to negate the particularity of our commitments. Yet unlike in Ancient Greece, where the reasons for one’s guilt were seen as an extension

of one's fate, the experience of guilt at the close of Enlightenment Europe is precisely the opposite. In forcing guilt upon agents "cut off" from any ethical order—that one is guilty simply for being mortal—the complete inadequacy of Enlightenment ideals as a concrete way of life is exposed. The experience of disjunction epitomized in revolutionary France forces the dignity of self-consciousness in its singularity to assert itself and confront the complete inversion of its own selfhood. It is this realization in its lived reality that ultimately brings home the limitations of Enlightenment Europe as a historical world, where finite selves crash up against the limits of the empty ethical vernacular their own culture has created.

Much more could be said here of the move to morality proper, and the discovery of the primacy of personal morality—of the transition to the supremacy of conscience and subjective guilt (ch. VI, C)—but I believe my point about the unique priority of moral imputation for the historical development of spirit should have some measure of plausibility. Returning to our first question, which concerns how the dynamism of moral imputation can be said to move history, I think my account makes clear the extent that issues of accountability reveal the inadequacy of a given age to accommodate the burgeoning reality of spirit's autonomy. Moreover, it should be stressed that the necessity of this movement in history is revealed reconstructively, through discerning the obligations that communities experience in exploring their own deepest possibilities.³¹ This means that although we can indicate the sources of spiritual transformation in history, this does not allow us to predict with precision the specific forms of ethical life that will inevitably arise in the future, but only indicate those general moral dilemmas that self-consciousness cannot avoid in the act of creating its own histories.³²

The second question we addressed was whether such experiences of moral imputation are only of transitional significance, or whether they can be said to have some intrinsic ethical value or "infinite worth" of their own. My answer to this question is that since no other experience than that of moral imputation has the power to push agents outside their historical facticity to confront the specter of their own singular worth, our ethical obligations do have intrinsic value in the sense that they are a unique and irreducible expression of the reality of freedom, without which no experience of concrete autonomy would be complete. Far from being "mere transitions" that testify to the relativity of moral concerns, the experience of moral imputation illustrates that the ultimate gauge of the development of freedom in history is the capacity of our various historical worlds to find a meaningful home for our own interiority.

The last major issue that we need to broach is whether there is any reason to believe that Hegel later renounced the importance of moral imputation for the development of spirit in his lectures on history. Although it is true that Hegel insists in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* that “world historical individuals” move history, meeting the needs of the age by unconsciously initiating the next phase of spirit’s development (*VpG*, 30–31/46–47), this need not diminish the unique importance of moral imputation for the consciousness of freedom in history. No doubt, for Hegel, Caesar, Alexander, and Napoleon are the great agents of history, whose own ambitions brought them to wager the established practices of their age. These world-historical individuals are the primary initiators of historical change, and yet their moral vision, or lack thereof, plays no role for Hegel in assessing the necessity of their accomplishments. Despite this fact, I believe there remains another level of transformation that is much more subtle, and whose consequences Hegel would agree are that much more indicative of the maturity of spirit in history. This level of transformation refers to how we experience those ethical obligations that supply the final anchor for our sense of belonging in the world of nature. Consequently, although we may owe much of the explicit push of history, and the rise and fall of nations, to the ambition of world historical individuals, it is to the aftermath of their actions that we must look if we are to assess the true extent of spirit’s self-discovery. That is not to condone the violence and senseless injustices of the past, but only to say we can learn from them.³³

Whether it is Enlightenment Europe or the Oriental world, ancient Greece or the Roman Empire, each is a lens through which the freedom that defines spirit is played out. Consequently each has its own unique ethical life, which cements the concerns of self-conscious individuals within a meaningful cultural totality. It is these concerns that show us glimpses of the life of spirit from the inside out, where the existential contest to forge a free society continues to press forward. As Hegel famously states in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*:

Spirit is at war with itself; it has to overcome itself as its most formidable obstacle. That development which in the sphere of nature is a peaceful growth, is in that of Spirit, a severe, a mighty conflict with itself. What Spirit really strives for is the realization of its Ideal being; but in doing so, it hides that goal from its own vision, and is proud and well satisfied in this alienation from it. (*VpG*, 55/76)

The most formidable obstacle of all to achieve is balancing the limitless depths of our power for self-determination with concrete actuality. History is the unique site of this balancing act, and there is no compelling reason to believe Hegel ever gave up this insight. The cultural worlds spirit engenders are the environments through which human beings experience the full reality of their own possibilities. This struggle is not easy precisely because it deals with that restless negativity which is the condition of all our accomplishments, good and evil alike. History is the confirmation of this struggle, which shows us again and again that we cannot avoid being imputed by the weight of our own interiority. To discern this charge in the unfolding of history is to learn one of the most enduring lessons that Hegel can teach us.

Notes

1. I use the term *moral* imputation rather than ethical because I want to draw attention to the peculiar difficulty that arises when agents are forced to assess the measure of their own accountability, rather than the security and meaning they experience when fulfilling the duties imposed by cultural life (which I take *Sittlichkeit* to indicate). For an account of some of the different roles the concept of morality plays for Hegel, consider the following: B. Bitsch, *Sollensbegriff und Moralitätskritik bei Hegel. Interpretationen zur "Wissenschaft der Logik," "Phänomenologie," und "Rechtsphilosophie"* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1977); Roland Pelzer, "Studien über Hegels ethische Theoreme," *Archiv für Philosophie* 13 (1964): 3–49; Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Robert Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

2. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991). Hereafter referred to as *VpG* with the English pagination preceding the German, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Werke* 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999).

3. See Lewis P. Hinchman, "On Reconciling Happiness and Autonomy: An Interpretation of Hegel's Moral Philosophy," *The Owl of Minerva* 23 (1991–92): 29–48. Hinchman points out that the various shapes in Hegel's *Phenomenology* all disintegrate because they sense, but are unable to articulate, the missing moral dimension of their identity, 39–40. My own interpretation tries to make this idea more explicit at the level of historical transitions from one world of spirit to another.

4. Saul Tobias explores the limitations with taking Hegel's master and slave dialectic as a model of recognition in his article "Hegel and the Politics of Recognition," *The Owl of Minerva* 38 (2006–07): 101–26. I agree with Tobias that recognition should not be separated from a process of self-determination; a fact that becomes even clearer once the importance of moral imputation for Hegel is discerned.

5. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1827) One-volume edition, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson and J. M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 214. For the German citation see *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, Vol. 4a, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1984), 424.

6. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, 2nd ed., tr. J. B. Baillie (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961). Hereafter referred to as *PhG* with the English pagination preceding the German, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, hg. Hans-Friedrich Wessels und Heinrich Clairmont (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1988).

7. Leon J. Goldstein, "Force and the Inverted World in Dialectical Retrospection," *International Studies in Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (1988): 19.

8. This is not to say that Hegel's treatment of the issue of moral obligation is confined to his analysis of spirit proper (chapter VI), since he also discusses this at some length in chapter V ("Reason," section B) "Realization of rational self-consciousness through itself" (and C) "Individuality, which takes itself to be real in and for itself," which can be seen as not only a criticism of Kant and Fichte's approach to morality, but of Rousseau as well; see subsection 2b of section B, chapter V, "The law of the heart and the frenzy of self-conceit." However, these positions are abstractions of morality in the sense they present explicit definitions of how morality is to operate, for instance, as formulating laws or following one's heart, that arise to a large extent in abstraction from the community, and thus from history. My interest is with indicating how the experience of moral obligation itself becomes concrete within actual communities, which initially arises in simply performing those duties expected of us, where morality has no explicit thematization.

9. As Jean Wahl comments in his book on the development of Hegel's concept of conscience, the notion of guilt played a central role in Hegel's earlier theological writings, which Wahl sees as the key concept in Hegel's transition away from theology to philosophy, a move that becomes explicit in the *Phenomenology*. As Wahl writes: "The capital notion that marks the entrance from an apologetic theology to the history that becomes a logic is the bad conscience [*conscience malheureuse*]." See *Le Malheur de la Conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), VI.

10. Hegel, *System of Ethical Life*, trans. T. M. Knox and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 132. *System der Sittlichkeit*, hg. Georg Lasson (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1967), 41.

11. The importance of this distinction was drawn to my attention by Robert Williams, for which I am grateful. Hegel offers the following explanation of the distinction in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*: "The independent solidity and totality of the heroic character repudiates any division of guilt between subjective intentions and the objective deed and its consequences, while nowadays, owing to the complexity and ramification of action, everyone has recourse to everyone else and shuffles guilt off himself as far as possible. Our view in this matter is more *moral*, in that in the moral sphere the subjective aspect, i.e., knowledge of the circumstances, conviction of the good, and the inner intention, constitute for us a chief element in the action." See Hegel, *Aesthetics, Lectures on Fine Art*

Vol. I, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 188. For the German see volume 13 of Hegel's *Sämmtliche Werke*, 247.

12. Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth, and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 27.

13. Hegel is quite explicit about the fact that that all of the other forms of conscious experience up to spirit have been abstractions of sorts, which presuppose the reality of spirit as the originary ground of their existence (*PhG*, 459/288). I agree with John O'Donohue that these previous forms of spirit cannot be seen as actual presuppositions of spirit, but are "decisive moments" in the unfolding of experience that are unable to successfully stabilize themselves, pushing beyond themselves toward their underlying reality, spirit proper. Each is an attempt to thematize an element of spirit's development, which is necessary to show the extent to which spirit is self-grounding, yet they do not "exist," *per se*, in their own right, but are reflective moments that illustrate the inability of restricting the vitality of spirit to a single moment. See John O'Donohue, *Person als Vermittlung: Die Dialektik von Individualität und Allgemeinheit in Hegels "Phänomenologie des Geistes"* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1993), Part III, section 11, 278–87, esp. 284. O'Donohue argues that the concept of "person" is the conceptual cornerstone of the *Phenomenology*, mediating the poles of universality and individuality in the development of spirit into concreteness. I largely agree with this approach to the *Phenomenology* and take a similar perspective in my own reading.

14. This process of spiritual development is not, contrary to what Kojève thinks, only a recapitulation of the master-slave dialectic (ch. IV, section A, "Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage"). First, from the point of view of how spirit actually experiences its own unfolding, although it is true that elements of this "struggle to the death" periodically emerge, notably in the section on the French Revolution, the agents involved in this movement do not see themselves as either "slaves" or "masters," but as fitting into a *meaningful* totality from which they discover the import of their own singularity. The conflict is one of self-alienation, and not a fight to the death, since every affirmation of singularity (being-for-itself) also singularizes the spiritual community, forcing self-conscious agents into making sense of their essence on their own terms. It is the impossibility of doing so that sets the stage for self-consciousness to transcend its own singularity through the act of forgiveness, in which the move to religion as the awareness of spirit as an absolute totality is made (ch. VII). See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. J. H. Nichols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

15. Terry Pinkard summarizes this point well by stating that the Greeks did not confuse "is" and "ought." "For them, what they *ought* to do followed from the way things *are*, from the background understanding that this is 'the way things are done,' which for them was a *fact* about social life." See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 140. Although I agree with Pinkard's initial description of this phase of spirit, he downplays the role of guilt in effecting the transition

out of the immediacy of the Greek city-state, overlooking an essential aspect of Hegel's account of natural ethical life.

16. For a good account of the importance of Hegel's insight here for issues of feminism and social criticism see Jeffrey A. Gauthier, *Hegel and Feminist Social Criticism: Justice, Recognition, and the Feminine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), esp. Part One, "Emergent Action And Normativity in Hegel," and Shannon Hoff, "Restoring Antigone to Ethical Life: Nature and Sexual Difference in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," *The Owl of Minerva* 38 (2006–07): 77–99.

17. Wilfried Goossens, "Ethical Life and Family in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in *Hegel on the Ethical Life, Religion, and Philosophy (1793–1807)* ed. A. Wyllleman (Belgium: Leuven University Press and Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989): 163–94, 172.

18. As Hegel specifies, what drives natural consciousness here, its "absolute right," is that its deeds are directly known—this is "the mode and form of its realization" (*PhG*, 487/307).

19. As Williams points out, Hegel employs the concept of "other" to indicate both an independent being, as well as the relation of self to itself, as something initially other. This "othering of self" is the process of "self-estrangement." See Williams, *Recognition*, 153. As I see it, the experience of moral imputation exemplifies this process of self-estrangement, which forces agents to confront the multiple implications of their own singular identity.

20. The full text reads as follows: "*Dem sittlichen Selbstwußtsein stellt auf diese Weise eine lichtscheue Macht nach, welche erst, wenn die geschehen, hervorbricht und es bei ihr ergreift; denn die vollbrachte Tat ist der aufgehobne Gegensatz des wissenden Selbst, und der ihm gegenüberstehenden Wirklichkeit. Das Handelnde kann das Verbrechen und seine Schuld nicht verleugnen;—die Tat ist dieses, das Unbewegte zu bewegen und das nur erst in der Möglichkeit Verschlossene hervor zu bringen, und hiemit das Unbewußte dem Bewußten, das Nicht-sein dem Sein zu verknüpfen*" (*PhG*, 490/309).

21. As Hegel reiterates years later in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*: "That very subjective Freedom which constitutes the principle and determines the peculiar form of Freedom in *our* world . . . could not manifest itself in Greece otherwise than as a *destructive element*," eventually plunging "the Greek world into ruin, for the polity which that world embodied was not calculated for this side of humanity—did not recognize this phase" (*VpG*, 253/309).

22. Now, the claim can be made that in the *Phenomenology*, at least at the level of culture, good and evil are not moral terms in the strict sense, but only metaphysical concepts, which is the claim that John O'Donohue makes. See John O'Donohue, *Person als Vermittlung: Die Dialektik von Individualität und Allgemeinheit in Hegels* "Phänomenologie des Geistes," 316. Yet Hegel's point here is precisely that self-consciousness is initially unable to differentiate between cultural norms and moral concepts, not that moral warrants are inactive or inoperative. The concepts of good and bad are already moral, because they encompass the practical concerns of the subject by indicating how these concerns are fulfilled, as well as what my "particular" role is in fulfilling them.

I care about making the good choice because it matters to me *personally*. The underlying thematic concern is the attempt to unearth how and why it is that these concepts matter. It is this search that acts to differentiate the two poles, that of pure universality and moral imputation, whose unsuccessful resolution will result in the terror of the French Revolution.

23. Initially the “good” is what is universal, unquestioned and objective, stipulating the right way to live from the wrong, whereas the “bad” is identified with what is contingent, subjective, and relative. Thus, the good is what defines the meaning of objective reality, while the bad is what contradicts this reality, that which calls it into question (*PhG*, 519–20/327–28). Within this opposition, which permeates the entirety of self-conscious existence, the acceptable is distinguished from the unacceptable; the good is seen as that which appeals directly to all, while the bad exists as a force of exclusion, promoting personal welfare at the expense of social harmony.

24. Kainz makes the remark that “good” and “bad” function in this section as equivalent judgments to what does or does not cultivate subjectivity, yet it should be added that in the beginning of culture both good and bad contain their own warrants, they are “objective” and viewed as inherently meaningful; they are not attributes of the subject. They do eventually become “terms” of the subject, and with this identification lays the ruin of their conceptual legitimacy. See Howard P. Kainz, *Hegel's Phenomenology, Part II. The Evolution of Ethical and Religious Consciousness to the Absolute Standpoint* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), 44.

25. Pure insight and belief succeed in reestablishing the primacy of the true and the good through the rudimentary conceptual scheme of self and not-self: belief takes inwardness as *good* and externality as *bad*, while pure insight takes inwardness as *true* and externality as *false*. The compact solidity of the good and the true from which our analysis of culture began, has become completely separate domains of experience, each of which approach finite existence only in reference to its own pure vocabulary of universality (*PhG*, 578/370).

26. What should not be overlooked is how each universal shape of the pure I (that of belief and pure insight) arises out of an ethical crisis of commitments, reducing the truth of this existence to structures of pure consciousness. These two molds of universality totalize the lives of self-conscious agency, trading the reality of singular existence for an explanation of what it means to exist.

27. As Axel Honneth explains: “For Hegel, then, the real challenge posed by the age must have been the question generated by the Revolution, namely, how that sphere of abstract freedom which had been won through political struggle could itself be embedded in an overarching context so that it would not unleash its atomizing capacity *ad infinitum*, but rather become a positive formative element in an ethical community.” See Axel Honneth, “Atomism and Ethical Life: On Hegel's Critique of the French Revolution,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 14 (1988): 359–68, 361–62.

28. Hegel describes this frightful process in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* as follows: “The principle of the Freedom of the Will, therefore, asserted itself against existing right. . . . The political condition of France at that

time presents nothing but a confused mass of privileges altogether contravening Thought and Reason—an utterly irrational state of things, and one with which the greatest corruption of morals [*die höchste Verdorbenheit der Sitten*], of Spirit was associated—an empire characterized by Destitution of Right, and which, when its real state begins to be recognized, becomes shameless destitution of Right. The fearfully heavy burdens that pressed upon the people, the embarrassment of the government to procure for the Court the means of supporting luxury and extravagance, gave the first impulse to discontent [*gaben den ersten Anlaß zur Unzufriedenheit*]. The new Spirit began to agitate men's minds: oppression drove men to investigation. . . . The change was necessarily violent, because the work of transformation was not undertaken by the government . . . unwilling to surrender the privileges they possessed, either for the sake of expediency or that of Abstract Right" (*VpG*, 446/528). It is interesting to note that in his lectures on history Hegel attributes much of the widespread violence throughout the French Revolution to the abstract sense of religious belief that was operative throughout this period—the religious conscience—dismantling the concrete force of right from the legitimating power of moral conviction by separating the interests of the secular and the spiritual.

29. Shklar sees the fact of "mortal fear" as merely instructing individuals to accept discipline and restraint, thereby reuniting them with the "substantial reality" of spirit. See Judith Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 174. In seeing the only outcome of the self of absolute freedom as another type of submission, I believe Shklar completely misses the meaning of not only this chapter, but the text of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, which has very little to do with a "lament for Hellas" (85).

30. Hegel seems to confirm this view in stating that the development of spirit, which he describes as a "cycle of necessity" up to that point, would cease "if only complete interpenetration of self-consciousness and the substance were the final result" (*PhG*, 607/392). Indeed, the cultural worlds that spirit has created thus far need not be intolerable places to exist. As Hegel clearly states, it is possible that the particular individual (*Besonders*) "would be able to endure [*könnte ertragen*] the objective reality of universal spirit, a reality, excluding self-consciousness *qua* particular" (*PhG*, 607/392). Yet if consciousness could live with the recognition of itself as *instrument* of the universal, from whence comes the necessity to move onward; the answer is freedom, the move to take responsibility for the singularities that we are.

31. In taking this stance I side with scholars such as Kain who credit Hegel with a certain degree of freedom in the examples he chooses to emphasize, which points to Hegelian necessity in its retrospective elements, rather than prospective. See Philip J. Kain, "The Structure and Method of Hegel's *Phenomenology*," *Clio* 27, no. 4 (1998). That moral imputation is an issue for spirit is something ingrained in the texture of experience itself, yet the examples that make this most clear owe something to Hegel's own peculiar genius. What this means, *pace* interpreters such as Dove, is that Hegel's method in the *Phenomenology* is not simply observing, but a pedagogical lesson on how to read the dialectical

nature of experience in its comprehensiveness. See Kenley R. Dove, "Hegel's Phenomenological Method," in *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Jon Stewart (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 52–75. For a recent and informative summary on how questions of methodology relate to necessity, and the problem with approaches such as that of Dove, see Wendy Lynn Clark and J. M. Fritzman, "Reducing Spirit to Substance: Dove on Hegel's Method," *Idealistic Studies* 32, no. 2 (2002): 73–100.

32. For an informative and recent survey of interpretations on Hegel's account of historical progress, see Frederick Rausher, "The Regulative and the Constitutive in Kant's and Hegel's Theories of History," *Idealistic Studies* 32, no. 2 (2002): 121–42.

33. For a recent informative account of Hegel and his relation to the problem of evil in history, see Alice Ormiston, *Love and Politics: Re-interpreting Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), esp. 118–24.

The Mechanization of Labor and the Birth of Modern Ethicality in Hegel's Jena Political Writings

Nathan Ross

Hegel's mature philosophy of history considers history as the actualization of the idea of freedom, a process that occurs on a variety of levels, in the formation of political institutions, religious practices, as well as philosophical developments. This chapter will consider this process of actualization on a somewhat different level, however, namely in terms of Hegel's thinking about the historical importance of economic processes, in particular the nature of human labor pursuits. Clearly, Hegel's mature political philosophy invites such a connection, as his account of civil society considers the "system of needs" as a sphere in which subjectivity is formed and educated so as to participate in social life, and it regards the advantage of the modern state over the ancient polis as consisting in the relative autonomy that it allows to economic activities. Yet Hegel's account of civil society here in the *Philosophy of Right* is not historical in its methodology (aside from a few historical remarks), and his mature philosophy of history, though it gives foundational significance to the role of self-interest in the actualization of historical forces, gives little attention to the economic sphere. It is necessary to turn to Hegel's Jena writings, in particular his *Essay on Natural Right*, and his *System of Ethical Life* (both from 1802), to find him treating the vital role that the development of economic forces plays in the unfolding of historical processes, and much of what he develops here will be consistent with and relevant to both his later account of civil society and his understanding of the actualization of freedom in a historical sense.

My argument is that these texts describe the nature of human labor pursuits as inherently "mechanistic" in their developmental principle,

meaning that they isolate the activity of individuals from the pervasive teleological organization of their common existence;¹ his (mechanistic understanding of labor) places these pursuits in contrast to Hegel's organic grasp of "ethical life" during this era. And yet I will argue that Hegel comes to the paradoxical insight in these writings that *the modern state is a more pervasively organic form of ethical life to the degree that it includes and does not negate or stifle this mechanism*. Thus, it will be necessary to consider this mechanism thesis from three perspectives: first, it must be clarified how labor is inherently mechanistic; then I will demonstrate how Hegel includes this mechanism in his historical conception of ethical life, and hence grasps it as contributing to the actualization of freedom; finally, I will consider how this force has the tendency to "become positive" according to Hegel and thus embody a one-sided form of historical development that is destructive of ethical life. The strength of Hegel's historical vision here in the Jena texts, as opposed to his later philosophy of history, is perhaps the very fact that he leaves this possibility open, that he sees in the forces of the modern economy *both* the possibility for a deeper and more pervasive kind of social freedom than that of previous historical epochs, as well as the possibility for a profoundly alienating form of progress that is destructive of any vision of human society in which we could be at home.

The Mechanization of Labor

In *System of Ethicality*, Hegel gives an account of "labor" as what he calls a nonethical, or natural, potency of the ethical. In this section, Hegel demonstrates that even when work is divorced from its social or ethical context, it tends by its own conceptual development toward an increasingly mechanical form of labor, as well as toward instilling in the laborer a consciousness of "right." Labor is here treated as the interaction of humans with their natural environment, their transformation of their environment in order to meet their needs. But Hegel approaches the concept of labor from two perspectives, or under two "potencies": one which he calls "subsuming the concept under the intuition," the other which he calls "subsuming the intuition under the concept." Under the first "potency," he gives a conception of labor as an immediate relation to nature, in which there is the moment of natural need, the moment of negation of a natural object and the moment of satisfaction in which the cycle ends. Here the subject of labor is subordinated to the natural object at which work is directed. But Hegel then treats labor from a second perspective, in which there is the moment of labor, the product

of labor and the “tool” as a product of labor that can be reapplied to the labor process.² He calls this second potency of work “subsuming the intuition under the concept,” since now the labor process is no longer subordinate to nature, but nature is subordinate to work. In this second kind of work, Hegel is considering the kind of work in which humans produce an accumulation, beyond meeting their immediate desires. We no longer just “consume” the object, but modify it so as to serve us. We no longer work in order to satisfy our immediate desire, but suspend acting on our immediate desire in order to bring forth a product that relates to the totality of desires in a “universal” way. It is clear that for Hegel the second potency is the one that opens up onto further forms of ethical involvement, since only to the degree that work leads to a product does it also involve a properly social component in which humans can encounter the products of their respective labor.

Hegel describes the second potency of work as tending to become “increasingly mechanical.” In the first form of work, the relation between subject and object could best be described as teleological (in the sense of what Hegel would later call external teleology): the subject has a desire, the object is negated to fulfill the desire, and then the subject enjoys the negation of the object. But in the second form of labor, the work-activity does not negate, but “causes” an object to which it is not immediately related through a relation of desire. “Labor in [this second potency] is hence completely mechanical, for singularity, abstraction, pure causality is in the form of indifference and is the ruling factor, it is something external even for the object. . . . This subject is a singular, absolute being-for-itself, thus absolute separation and difference” (*GW* V, 285). This work relates to the object not as a subject to an object (i.e., immediate negation), but as one object to another object, and this is the sense of a mechanistic relation here. The subject only manages to reestablish itself in the negative relation to object when it is outside of the labor process; only there can it “enjoy” the product of labor. But because of this mechanistic aspect of labor, the subject can also increasingly “save itself” from labor by using tools and even machines: to the degree that work is simply an object working on another, the human can use one external object to work on another, and thus not “wear itself out” in the labor process.

The second form of labor leads to replacing the teleological aspect of work with a mechanistic aspect, but it also leads to what Hegel here calls the “education” (*Bildung*) of the subject. “The universal, reciprocal interaction and education of humans; their absolute equality is here latent, and in terms of this whole potency, in which we are here, the relation is only present in the individual; a recognition that is reciprocal,

or the highest individuality and external difference” (*GW* V, 290). Since this kind of work does not relate to objects through the medium of immediate desire, but by suspending desire and treating objects as indifferent, mechanical objects, it introduces a form of indifference into subjects that extends to their relation to other humans as well.³ In the first potency, Hegel says, the only mediating factor between humans was the particularity of sexual difference. But here in this potency, we do not just desire other human beings in terms of their particularity, but we relate to them in terms of the entirety of their relation to objects. Hegel eventually demonstrates that the creation of “products” and the use of tools makes possible the use of language or “discourse” as a kind of tool that serves us in communicating about our common involvements with objects.

Here in this opening section of *System of Ethical Life*, Hegel also describes how certain “relations of right” result out of the second form of labor. It is by no means original to justify property rights as implied by and arising out of rational labor processes that produce an excess; thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau did so as well. They argue that we would never have the incentive to produce an excess or a “product” if there were not some assurance that the product would be to our exclusive benefit. But Hegel, by contrast, here justifies the formation of a sense of “right” out of the transformation of human subjectivity through the mechanization of labor. Insofar as my “work” does not relate immediately to fulfilling my “need,” but produces a product that at some further phase can fulfill my need, or another person’s, I form the consciousness of products as being the “same,” as having a value that can be comparable to each other. And Hegel here argues that in this consciousness of things as “the same,” I also learn to relate to other humans as the “same” as me. Thus, he bases the possibility of recognition between subjects on the moment in which humans first learn to see objects not as fulfilling a desire, but as representing a distinct and comparable “value” in relation to other objects. In this section, Hegel demonstrates how this abstract notion of equality resulting out of mechanical work leads to the possibility of recognizing the property of another (*GW* V, 303),⁴ entering into a contract with another (*GW* V, 302), but also enslaving, or being enslaved by, another (*GW* V, 305).

Modern Ethicality

In both of these 1802 texts, *Natural Right* and *Ethicality*, Hegel devotes extensive attention to the notion of civil society,⁵ that is, to the place of

commercial activities within political life. In both texts, he uses a common measuring stick in approaching civil society: the notion of “ethicality” (*Sittlichkeit*) as a speculative idea. To say that ethicality is a speculative idea is to make the claim that human society, if it is to fully embody and realize human freedom, must embody a conceptual structure that is quite similar to that of an organism: it must be self-sustaining in the way that it motivates individuals to take part in it; it must embody a relation of internal teleology between the parts and the whole; and it must have a kind of earthly “immortality” that transcends the finitude of individual actors within it. Hegel would essentially maintain this notion of ethicality from 1802 until his later *Philosophy of Right*. Thus, he views the ethical as a living system, but unlike the philosophers of German Romanticism who also consider the healthy political society in organic terms, he no longer simply views the organic as altogether separate from the mechanistic: in these Jena writings the organic can only sustain itself and develop by making its “unorganic nature” into part of itself.⁶ Civil society becomes for Hegel this sphere of mechanism that is taken up into ethicality and integrated into it without destroying its organic nature.

In *Natural Right*, Hegel describes the development of the institutions of civil society from the perspective of a broad philosophy of history. In this text, Hegel is trying to reconcile the notion of ethicality embodied in the Greek city state with the development of “bourgeois” freedom inherent in the modern era. He accomplishes this by viewing “ethicality” as an organism that develops and regenerates itself by learning to make its “inorganic basis” (*GW IV*, 459) into part of itself. Hegel begins his account of ethicality by distinguishing within Greek life two distinct estates or classes (*Stände*): the class of the free and the class of the un-free. Following the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, Hegel calls the class of merchants and workers the class of the un-free. The free class is the one made up of those involved in the governance of the city, and they are free to the degree that they are able to attain to an “intuition” of the whole, and that they are willing to brave death in order to protect the life of the city. The “un-free class” lacks this freedom to the degree that its members are stuck in what Hegel calls the “extremes of the concept,” which is to say in singular determinations that are opposed to each other, such as “need-work” and “work-enjoyment.”⁷ The un-free class only manages to unify the moments of the concept through a physical process; while the free class dwells in the simple “point of indifference,” in that its appreciation of the whole process is inherently “spiritual.” Using the language of the speculative concept, Hegel specifies that while the free class dwells in the undifferentiated

ideality of the concept, the un-free class dwells in the bifurcated extremes of the concept, “the reflection of absolute unity.”

As Hegel makes clear in his discussion of the structure of the concept of ethicality, the structure is whole only in this entire process, that is, the concept consists in the bifurcation of its moments and the taking back of these moments into a vision of their unity. In Greek ethical life, the speculative form of the concept implies that the un-free class only takes part in the ethical thanks to the free class, and the free class only through the un-free class. But although both classes make up integral moments in the creation of ethicality, of a functioning social whole in which there is a vision of freedom, only one of the classes enjoys the “intuition” of such freedom. Freedom, here in this context, means giving up one’s individuality for the sake of the whole, subsisting as much as possible in the moment of universality within the concept. “A free death,” the willingness to die for the city and the courage that goes along with such a stance, are the virtues that stem from such a freedom.⁸

Hegel’s description of the nature of the political class in ancient Greece and his identification of this class with “*Tapferkeit*” demonstrates the manner in which his conception of ancient ethicality is essentially based in an account of “political virtue.” However, it will become clear in what follows that by the time that Hegel wrote this text, he no longer believes that such political virtues as the Greek *Tapferkeit* could serve as the constitutive force of modern political life.⁹ This shift in his thought departs from the realization that this class and the form of ethicality that it represents is inferior to that of the modern state, precisely to the degree that the modern state includes the notion of bourgeois freedom, that is, the development of a more universal form of freedom that stems from the pursuit of economic activities that stood within Greek society under the aspect of the un-free class.

For Hegel, the departure of the ancient city-state means a fundamental change within “ethicality,” and a shift in what it means to be free. He calls this change the “tragedy within the ethical.” He writes: “In the loss of absolute ethicality and the degradation of the noble class, the two hitherto separate classes have become equal, and with the end of slavery comes the end of freedom as well” (*GW IV*, 456).¹⁰ But Hegel argues in the course of this essay that the rise of bourgeois equality does not represent a simple death of the ethical life. The notion of tragedy does not imply a simple loss of the ethicality expressed in the ancient Greek state, but a movement of “sacrifice” aimed at regaining wholeness. The soul dies to make itself one with the body, but in so doing it imbues the body with a life of its own. Hegel borrows a phrase from Plato in calling ethicality “an immortal animal in which body and soul

are eternally giving birth to each other" (GW IV, 462). This mixing of the "free" and the "un-free" classes represents not just a moment of leveling, but a moment of further, more developed and pervasive differentiation within the syllogistic whole called ethicality. In the hitherto developed conception of ethicality in terms of two classes, the concept had two moments, one of pure unity (the intuition of freedom) and one of bifurcated unity (the governed life of the worker or merchant). This form of ethicality must cease, "sacrifice itself," in order to generate a more pervasive unity between the moment of unity and difference.

Hegel poses the question: What would happen if the organizing principle of the second, un-free class were allowed to divide itself off and posit itself as autonomous? Could such a social whole ever organize itself in such a way as to become a form of ethicality? In becoming independent in this manner, this class makes one of the conceptual extremes into the unifying medium of ethical life. The negative unity of the concepts, "desire-work" and "work-enjoyment," remains the governing principle of this class, but this principle is allowed to organize itself as much as possible into a rational whole (what Hegel would later call a "system of needs"). This results in the concept of "bourgeois freedom," a kind of freedom that no longer consists in the sacrifice of the individual to the universal, but in the protection of individuality as a "universal" right. Such a freedom "has the unity of the concept only as an imitated, negative independence, namely as the freedom of the individual" (GW IV, 461). In such a conception, freedom would mean the absolute right of the individual to work and own, the right to life and property and to pursue prosperity. Hegel makes it clear that he considers such a form of freedom a mere shadow of the form of freedom represented by the Greek model of ethicality, and yet he writes, "[E]ven if the essence of ethicality views this [bourgeois freedom] as something foreign, still it intuitively it and is in spirit one with it" (GW IV, 461). This cryptic phrase seems crucial to understanding what Hegel views as the relation between "ethicality" and bourgeois freedom within civil society. But what does he mean by calling the latter a negative reflection of the former? How does this clearly lesser form of modern freedom relate to the model of ethicality he has developed up to this point?

We have up to now two conceptions of freedom, the freedom of the individual to give up its singularity and think and act as part of a unified social fabric, and the freedom of the individual to pursue its own interests and see its achievements protected as a form of right. He tells us that the first form must learn to recognize itself in the latter and be "in spirit one with it." For Hegel already in this period, this is only possible in and through a state that allows civil society to develop itself by

ensuring certain rights to individuals, a conception he would develop at much greater length in his later *Philosophy of Right*. This form of ethicality is superior in that the material substrate of society is no longer un-free, but lives in at least a negative reflection of the intuition of freedom.¹¹ To the degree that this negative reflection of freedom develops, the ethical whole is more pervasively integrated, since now the class that had previously been considered as the un-free class is bound to the ethical whole out of a sense of their self-interest. Thus, Hegel's argument seems to be that a totality is more organic as the parts become more teleologically connected to the whole, out of a purpose that is their own, and that the modern state is more organic since its model of ethicality accomplishes this through the factor of bourgeois rights.¹²

But for Hegel this historical affirmation of civil society goes along with the notion that it is a negative moment of the realization of the idea of ethicality. The kind of freedom that it aspires to and the kinds of rights that it entails are only possible within a state that does not take the ends of civil society as its own. "What is by nature negative cannot become positive, must remain negative and must not become something solid" (*GW IV*, 450). Yet Hegel acknowledges that the freeing of the slaves goes hand in hand with the destruction of the "free class" as a free class (*GW IV* 456). So how is it possible for this now more or less universal, commercial class to remain a negative, subordinate factor in the social whole? To put the question another way: How is freedom in a positive sense possible in a society that has done away with aristocratic rule and replaced the freedom of self-sacrifice with the freedom of bourgeois right?

For Hegel this is only possible through the action of the state upon civil society, and through a new model of political activity as such. As he writes: "The ethical whole must maintain it [the commercial sphere] in the feeling of its inner nothingness and hinder its impetuous growth into ever greater differences and inequalities" (*GW IV*, 451). He goes on to argue that such a hindrance is only possible through the taxation of the wealthy, limitation of trade, the fighting of wars and the "jealousy of other classes."¹³ What Hegel gives here is a rather underdeveloped account of state regulation of the economy, but it at least serves to show that Hegel sees the solutions to the structural contradictions of civil society not in the communitarian ideals of ancient "ethicality," but in the regulative resources of the modern state as a distinctly modern form of "ethicality." Yet it remains to be clarified what these structural contradictions are for Hegel, how they result out of the unleashed power of the commercial class, and how this force can be held in a negative or subordinate position.

In the two texts that I have treated up to now, Hegel treats the genesis of civil society under two different methods, the *System of Ethicality* developing the concept of labor first outside of the ethical whole, the *Natural Right* essay treating civil society as a historical force arising out of the decline of ancient civilization. But there are certain common methodological points that connect these two texts from the same year. In describing work as tending toward “mechanization,” Hegel describes the way that work, by its own dialectic, leads to a kind of conceptual externality: the extremes of “desire-work” and “work-enjoyment” (which were unified in the first potency) only relate together through some kind of external mediation. As the division of labor progresses, the labor process is only “whole” in a mediating term that escapes the consciousness of the person engaging in work. Labor stands for a form of teleology that is increasingly divided against itself and in need of some external conceptual mediation. Thus, we have a key to understanding what Hegel means in *Natural Right* when he describes the working and trading class as the “inorganic nature of ethicality” and argues that this class dwells in the “extremes of the concept” (GW IV, 461). Since this class dwells in the extremes of the concept, it lacks the “intuition of freedom” inherent to the political class in the ancient world. For work to be mechanical thus means for it to represent an abstract, or one-sided, form of mediation within the conceptual whole that Hegel calls ethicality. And yet it is one of Hegel’s most important discoveries of these writings, both into the nature of the speculative concept and into the nature of social wholes, that the intuition of freedom can only grow in an organic sense through “sacrificing” itself to the divided form of externality and creating a new, more fundamental unity out of this bifurcation. This means that the kind of teleology present in political action, its ability to accomplish its goals in a way that arises out of and is immanent to the movement of society, will be greater if this mechanical, divided teleology of the laboring aspect of society becomes a free factor within the state.¹⁴

Up to now, I have discussed the Jena writings mostly in such a manner as to illustrate the positive ethical importance that Hegel attributes to the mechanistic aspect of civil society, its contribution to the state as a form of ethicality. But at the same time, these texts articulate a sharp critique of the contradictions that Hegel sees as latent in the modern economy, and these contradictions will also be diagnosed through considering civil society as a mechanistic aspect within the cohesive whole that Hegel calls ethicality. In order to arrive at Hegel’s critique of these contradictions, I will turn toward the notion of positivity that Hegel develops in the *Natural Right* essay.

The Positivity of Civil Society

Hegel devotes the fourth section of the *Natural Right* essay to an examination of the problem of “positivity,” a term of great importance in his early writings that he uses here to critique the so-called “positive juridical sciences.” In what follows, however, I will demonstrate that Hegel’s critique of positivity here relates not just to the form of the legal sciences, but more fundamentally to the very nature of the modern economy in its influence on social developments. Hegel defines positivity here as follows: positivity results whenever any “potency” of the ethical whole tries to separate itself off and establish its principles as unconditional demands without taking account of their genetic relation to the other potencies.¹⁵ He is worried primarily about two forms of positivity in modern society: the positivity of the “state” (which he associates here with Fichte’s overly regulated commercial state) and the positivity of civil society, a danger Hegel sees embodied in many prevalent legal theories of the day and perhaps more fundamentally in the actual practices of states of this time. Thus, Hegel makes it clear that positivity lies more in the “form” of laws than in their “content”; a law protecting the property of citizens is not in itself positive, but it becomes positive when it attempts to define such rights as “natural” and not determined by a certain level of commerce and political organization, and hence not subordinate to other concerns within society.

Hegel devotes most of his discussion here to the positivity of civil society. He argues that the legal forms of modernity are justified when taken as a consequence of a particular “potency,” an expression of the absolute under this potency. But positivity results when the legal sciences take the principles of “bourgeois right” as a totality that can be thought out of itself as absolute and unconditioned. Such an approach eventually leads to describing the principles of this potency as overriding or superseding (*übergreifen*) other potencies, that is, the predominance of bourgeois right over state right and people’s right. (He compares such positivity in the legal sciences to the scientist who attempts to explain organic and chemical phenomena through mechanical laws.)

In this text, in contrast to the Romantics, Hegel attributes great importance to the codification of laws. Hegel realizes, like the Romantics, that the codification of laws does not create public morality like that contained in customs (*Sitten*). But he argues that the moment of codification is a moment in which “ethicality” recognizes itself and gives intellectual form to its latent organic character. The way in which this recognition occurs can be one-sided, in that in codifying its laws a people can fail to give real credit to the ethical forms that make it up,

and such a misrecognition will then allow one part of the ethical fabric to dominate another and stifle the organism. Thus, Hegel embraces the “formalism” of the legal sciences out of his notion of the organic: a living whole is one in which the “form” supersedes the content, where the form assimilates its content to it. But even in a living whole there is a tendency toward positivity, when, in the growth of the whole, the customs and laws drift apart and no longer reflect each other. This manifests itself in a set of laws that contradict the actual lives of the people governed by them. Hegel argues that such a system of laws becomes mechanical, in that it relates parts to a whole in such a way that these parts do not have an understanding of their relation to the whole.¹⁶ Hegel even anticipates Marx in arguing that such positive laws become a means by which one class in society dominates another.

But for Hegel, such positivity does not simply result out of the misformulation of laws, or out of scientific errors; it results also out of the “material” of society itself. This becomes clear in the ensuing discussion of where such legal positivity comes from. He claims that positivity of laws comes not just from the past, that is, from a society clinging to outdated laws, but also from new developments that do not proceed in a properly organic way:

Not only that must be considered positive which belongs completely to the past and no longer has any living present and has an incomprehensible and shameless power because it is without inner meaning; also that power is without truly positive truth which merely perpetuates the dissolution and sundering of the ethical totality; the former is the history of a past life, while the latter is the determinate representation of the present death. (*GW IV*, 482–83)

I will argue that Hegel means here to claim, adding to his earlier notion of positivity, that false positivity dwells not just in the maintenance of the feudal order in German states, but also in the very tendencies of the new industrial economy. Positivity, or the legal form that does not adequately express the ethical dimension of a society, can result not just from a people outgrowing its laws, but also from a one-sided form of development inherent in civil society. Civil society has a tendency to posit as absolute the rights of a class that has a merely negative, individualistic conception of right. In doing so, it posits a subordinate moment of the social development as an absolute purpose of the development. The form of right is positive, or mechanical, to the degree that it posits a purely quantitative factor of economic life as a politically determinative force

within the social whole; this latter aspect will become clearer through a discussion of Hegel's analysis of modern class structures in the *System of Ethicality*.

In this text, Hegel's thesis on the positivity of civil society takes on a new, more specific dimension. In a later passage from the text (GW V, 349–57) Hegel gives a discussion of the class structures that arise out of the modern economy, analyzing how the dialectic of labor in a free market economy creates a measureless degree of inequality. In the *Natural Right* essay, Hegel has simply spoken of the “commercial class” (*Erwerbestand*), but in this latter section of *System of Ethical Life*, he argues that when this commercial aspect of society is allowed to develop in a relatively autonomous manner, it engenders distinct classes within itself, classes that are determined not by the political agency of individuals, but by their quantity of ownership. But the initially quantitative differences within the commercial class convert into “relations of dominance” between its members. Differences in the quantitative level of wealth between free citizens in a free market economy will lead to distinct relations of power and agency, an owning class and a working class.¹⁷ This class differentiation is different from the two classes of ancient Greek society distinguished in the *Natural Right* essay, in that here the distinction does not take place according to conceptual moments, for the classes have the same political rights and the same basic motivating principle in their activities. And yet the purely quantitative difference within the commercial class leads to a kind of domination that is all the more blind and ethically alienating. In the *Natural Right* essay, it was posited that the commercial class represented the separated “extremes of the concept” and that the extremes were only mediated by the activity of labor, rather than in an ethical intuition. But now in the *System of Ethical Life*, it seems that Hegel would claim that through the formation of quantitative inequalities within the commercial sector, this relative conceptual unity could become sundered, and lose even the external mediation described earlier.

In this state of affairs the well-off bring forth riches that are connected to the deepest poverty; for in the separation, labor on both sides becomes universal, objective; on the one side is ideal universality; on the other side it is real, mechanical, and this purely quantitative, conceptually individuated inorganic aspect of labor is the most elevated brutishness [*die höchste Roheit*]. (GW V, 354)

If work mediates between the moments of “need” and “enjoyment,” then in a class society with a separation between the working class and

the owning class, such as what Hegel describes here, these conceptual extremes no longer describe separate subjective aspects of a cohesive labor process, but separate social functions. Individual groups of human beings become pinned, as it were, to one side of the whole teleology of the labor process and pursue this one side with a measureless intensity. One class in society is completely absorbed by speculation upon the cultivation of new forms of luxury, while another group is immersed in the mechanical production of the materials needed to fulfill such speculations. The physical aspect of labor becomes increasingly mechanical, that is, subjectively detached from the enjoyment of the product of labor. The mental aspect of the production process, on the other hand, takes on the aspect of an infinite speculation on the creation of needs, which Hegel calls a completely "empty ideality" that can be cultivated to infinity.

Hegel sees potentially disastrous political consequences in this quantitative inequality within the commercial class. When groups within society become so confined to one side of the labor process, they become incapable of any intuition of the whole as an organic system. In ancient Greek ethical life, Hegel writes, at least the commercial class and the aristocracy could pray to the gods of the city;¹⁸ but in modernity, with the progressive development of economic inequality on purely economic grounds the commercial class becomes incapable of submitting itself to any divinity outside of its sphere.¹⁹ And with this inability, Hegel argues, the very possibility of a common ethicality disappears, in that separate members of society become so occupied with a socially mediated material prosperity that they are not capable of cultivating the kind of political institutions that make for fulfilling their desires.

It is clear from the dialectic Hegel describes here in this section of *Ethicality* that the political problem of the positivity of civil society emerges from within the very dialectic of labor. The tendency of the labor process to lead to increasingly mechanical forms of labor leads to the creation of a class structure in which political consciousness is destroyed and replaced by a kind of blind pursuit of economic development. Hegel turns this incapacity of civil society into a defense of a higher political moment in society that hinders the measureless pursuit of wealth and the development of excessive inequalities primarily through a system of taxation. As in the *Natural Right* essay, he views the role of the state in relation to the commercial activities of its citizens not only as that of protecting the property rights that make commerce possible, but that of limiting or hindering commerce so as to keep it from propagating socially destructive levels of inequality between citizens. But for Hegel the state's limitation of economic development is not a merely negative or restrictive factor, for it is the giving of a measure to

a form of development that is incapable of giving itself its own measure. The distinction between the commercial and the political in these essays could be described as the difference between mechanism and organism, between formless growth that is driven by a measureless desire to own and consume material goods in ever more refined ways and a principle of development that maintains an intuition of the whole while letting each part pursue its distinct function. Unlike the Romantic defense of society and culture in distinction to the state, Hegel views culture, at least in the West, as standing so much under the constraint of the principles of bourgeois development that an organic whole can only be achieved by reinventing within the European states a kind of political consciousness that has insight into the political nullity of bourgeois aspirations. Because of the distinctive function that is required of this state in regard to society, this political consciousness can no longer be described, like that of Greek ethical life, as an “intuition of the whole,” but instead takes the form of “thought.” The modern state is grounded not in the political virtues of those who act within it, but on the form of the concept, which dictates that each moment of the concept can only develop itself in through-going relation to the others. Thus, I would argue that for the Hegel who wrote these two works, the problem of inequality in modern economic relations, and the political problems that such inequality entails, cannot be solved merely through a “sense of community” or any such virtue, but through a rational insight into the kinds of structural problems that emerge out of such economic relations, and an institution capable of counteracting such institutions.

Notes

1. This definition of mechanism is borrowed, roughly speaking, from Hegel's logical treatment of mechanism in his *Science of Logic*. Cf. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke: Band VI* (Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968), 410 (hereafter, *GW VI*): “This is what constitutes the character of mechanism, namely, that, whatever relation obtains between the things combined, this relation is one that is extraneous to them that does not concern their nature at all, and even if it is accompanied by a semblance of unity it remains nothing more than composition, mixture, aggregation and the like.”

2. These two potencies of labor bear a close relation to Hannah Arendt's distinction between labor and work in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) the first potency corresponding to what Arendt calls labor, the second to work. The obvious difference, of course, is that Hegel considers the first potency as a kind of abstraction, since all human labor tends

in the direction of some repeatable labor process that transcends the actual consumption of the worked on object.

3. It would be easy to compare the two conceptions of labor here to the analysis of labor in the master-slave dialectic of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (1807). The first form of work from *Ethicality* is taken up there in the analysis of the master, who merely negates the object as something immediate, while the second form of work is taken up there in the case of the slave, who subordinates his desire to negate the object in working upon it. The *Phenomenology* makes clear moreover that the formation of spirit, its acquiring of a conception of its own freedom and of its right, is based in the work of the slave. This seems parallel to the manner in which Hegel here develops the notion of "right" out of the second conception of labor.

4. In discussing "right" within this section on work, Hegel does not think that he is giving an exhaustive account of what right is. He will make clear later in the text that these relations do not yet belong to the sphere of "ethicality." Instead, what Hegel does here is to demonstrate how human involvement with nature leads to certain determinate social relations, and to the formation of a primitive conception of right. Only later, in discussing industrial pursuits (cf. *GW* V, 350–57) as a part of "ethicality" will Hegel demonstrate how this basic conception of equality and security in one's possessions can exist as part of a sustainable social body. Thus, in the language of Hegel's later philosophy of objective spirit, this dialectic of labor belongs to the realm of abstract right rather than "civil society." But nevertheless, this basic account of how human labor transforms itself from a simple teleological activity into a mechanical and social process will remain implicit in Hegel's account of the nature of civil society as a "potency of the ethical." Later in the *Ethicality* essay, he discusses civil society (a "system of needs") as a moment in ethical life, and here too he speaks of the increasing mechanization of the labor process and of a one-sided notion of bourgeois right. Civil society begins, as it were, not with natural labor but with labor that has already attained to the second potency, and its correct account assumes the results of this dialectic of natural labor.

5. Hegel did not yet use the term *civil society* (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) until the 1817 *Encyclopedia*. However, since these texts are largely occupied with the issue of economic activities and the sphere of social involvements, rights, and institutions entailed by them, I have chosen to use this term here for the sake of expediency, since it makes clear the contrast between social/economic aspects and political aspects that Hegel is working with in these texts.

6. Throughout Hegel's Bern and Frankfurt writings, he often compares the organic structure of ancient political community to the mechanistic nature of modern social relations. However, it seems to me that the new element here in these Jena texts is the manner in which he grasps the logic of mechanism and organism not as utterly antinominal, but as two forms of processuality that can coexist.

7. When Hegel here explains that the "un-free" or laboring class dwells in the separated "extremes" of the concept, I believe this can be explained by reference to the prior treatment of work in the *System of Ethicality*, where

work involves the separation of “need-work” and “work-enjoyment.” The same aspect that makes work mechanical also makes this class of workers into a class of the “un-free.”

8. Ludwig Siep has written an excellent essay distinguishing the evolving conceptions of freedom in Hegel’s early thought; he considers the stance of *Freigabe des Einzelnen* (giving up one’s individuality) as definitive of Hegel’s notion of freedom in the NR essay. Cf. *Praktische Philosophie im deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 161. I will argue, however, that the text must be understood as an attempt to diagnose the limits of this notion of freedom and describe its relation to a different, negative model of freedom embodied in modern political institutions.

9. In his reading of the *Natural Right* essay, Laurence Dickey gives a rather strong role to the notion of *Tapferkeit* within Hegel’s thought of this time, and he views Hegel’s goal in the text as one of reinventing such a virtue within the modern context as a solution to the ethical problems of the modern economy. Cf. *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 220–27. In my view, this account of the role of *Tapferkeit* within the text fails to account for two serious issues: (1) the issue that I will explicate henceforth as the “tragedy within the ethical”; i.e., that the free class within the Greek *polis* must sacrifice itself in order to make bourgeois freedom possible; (2) where Hegel critiques or seeks to limit bourgeois self-interest in this essay he does so not from a description of political virtues, but from one of state regulation. In my view, the *Natural Right* essay marks a phase in Hegel’s development where he acknowledges that the form of ethicality, or social cohesion, that is founded in the virtues of the ruling class is an untenable, or not fully organic form of integration. Instead, he seeks to found the cohesion of the whole on a form of ethicality in which each of the parts is bound to the whole out of self-interest. Such a whole is, however, only approachable through a description of institutional rationality, not through the description of the subjective dispositions of the members of the state.

10. If we take this passage on the tragedy within the ethical as it stands, Hegel’s insight here bears a remarkable similarity to Arendt’s thesis regarding “the rise of the social” (*The Human Condition*, 38–50). Like Arendt, Hegel argues that the price for the political freedom of the laboring class is the loss of the kind of political autonomy that he sees embodied in the virtues of the ancient Greek aristocrats. But unlike Arendt, Hegel seeks to reinvent a particular kind of political autonomy that is reconcilable with, but not identifiable with, “the rise of the social.”

11. According to Hegel’s later *Philosophy of History* the difference between modern and ancient society consists in the fact that in ancient society only some were free, while in modern society all are free. The present passage in NR clearly serves as a kind of foundation for this position. It demonstrates, however, that this transition from some being free to all being free requires Hegel to mediate between two very distinct concepts of freedom: freedom as political virtue versus freedom as individual right. What seems crucial in the present discussion is the notion that this modern freedom is only seen as valu-

able insofar as it can actually be viewed as a factor that leads to more cohesive integration within society.

12. In a rather parenthetical context, Ludwig Siep gives an excellent articulation of this sense in which Hegel uses the term organism within the *Natural Right* essay: “*Paradoxerweise enthält gerade der Begriff des Organischen—der immer wieder als romantisch und totalitär kritisiert wurde—die ‘liberalen’ Züge der hegelschen Staatsphilosophie*” (*Praktische Philosophie im deutschen Idealismus*, 168). In the footnote Siep expands upon the meaning of the organic within Hegel’s political thought: “*Im Begriff des Organischen hat Hegel nicht nur die Einheit, sondern stets auch die Selbstständigkeit der Teile und das Vermögen, das Ganze gerade in ihrer besonderen Funktion zu repräsentieren, zu denken versucht.*” Needless to say, this conception of the organic is completely consonant with the notion that I am developing here. Since, however, my work is primarily interested in a definition of the mechanistic, rather than the organic, the point remains to be made that the organic must be thought of as containing or integrating the mechanistic forms of social existence within it.

13. Hegel admits that there are two ways in which the state limits civil society (GW IV, 451): advertent and inadvertent. An example of an inadvertent limitation would be the fighting of a war, which conscripts members of the working class and absorbs taxes. An example of an advertent limitation would be taxation of the wealthy intended to improve the lives of the poor. Hegel’s point is that any action of the state that limits the development of bourgeois interests is one that serves to give measure to the inherent measurelessness of the civil society, which tends toward ever greater social disparity.

14. In the work of Herder and perhaps also the earlier works of Hegel the figure of mechanism stood for the danger of the state in interfering with the “organic” development of society. Frederick Beiser gives an excellent account of this aspect of Romantic political theory. Cf. *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1992), 236–39. But here for Hegel the figure of mechanism stands for a principle of development *latent in society*; the state can only become organic by allowing this mechanism to subsist and yet drawing determinate limits on its activities. Hegel’s critique of mechanism, from henceforth in his writings, will revolve around an attempt to distinguish the functions of the state from the “measureless” developments associated with the modern economy.

15. Hegel’s term *potency* is derivative of Schelling’s nature philosophy, which uses this term to designate a developmental phase within the genesis of a systematic whole, a fragment in which the whole is visible at some phase of its organization. Hegel seems to use the term here in a somewhat different manner to designate each of the subsystems that make up a social whole, such as the family, the economy, and political institutions.

16. “The historical recognition of laws demonstrates . . . that there is now lacking in the living present an understanding [of the laws] and the meaning is lacking, even if through the form of law, and by way of the fact that the laws still represent the interests of some factions and these factions have attached their existence to these laws, these [laws] still have force and power” (GW IV, 481).

17. "This necessary inequality that establishes itself inside the commercial class and within all of the specialized branches of commerce brings forth a relation of dominance [*Herrschaftsverhältnis*] by way of its quantitative make-up, which only relates to degrees and is not capable of any other determination than that of degree; the individual, immensely wealthy one becomes a power, he sublates the form of pervasive physical dependence, to be of a particular and not a universal nature" (*GW* V, 353–54).

18. Cf. *Natural Right* III; *GW* IV, 462.

19. "The foremost character of the commercial class, that it is capable of an organic, absolute intuition, and of respect for an albeit foreign divinity, falls away; and the bestiality of disdain for everything higher emerges; the wisdom-less, the purely universal, the mass of wealth is determinative; and the absolute bond of the people, the ethical has disappeared, and the people dissolved" (*GW* V, 354).

Hegel's Claim about Democracy and His Philosophy of History

Mark Tunick

Introduction

Hegel claims that democracy was necessary for the ancient Athenians but is inappropriate for a modern state. My purpose is to clarify this claim by spelling out its underlying assumptions. I also hope to indicate how Hegel's views on democracy draw us into a larger controversy concerning Hegel's philosophy of history.

The larger controversy is about the extent to which Hegel's approach to history is empirical. On the one hand, Hegel is critical of original historians who merely describe the events they experience or witness, without reflection or having transcended the events (*RH*, 4); he advocates a philosophical method of history that does not seek just to record brute facts. Yet Hegel rejects as one-sided the view that a philosophy of history produces its own ideas without regard to given data (*RH*, 10). Hegel claims his approach to history is in some sense empirical:

Only the study of world history itself can show that it has proceeded rationally, that it represents the rationally necessary course of the World Spirit. . . . This [m]ust be the result of history. History itself must be taken as it is; we have to proceed historically, empirically [*empirisch*]. (*RH*, 12; *VP*G, 22)

For Hegel, history is governed by reason and culminates in the establishment of rational institutions, including private property, monogamous marriage, and hereditary monarchy, but not democracy. Does Hegel decide which institutions are rational on the basis of what he observes

to prevail in the latest stage of history? If different institutions had developed instead, such as community property, polygamy, and elective monarchy or other democratic forms of government, would Hegel have accepted the relativistic implications of his view that history must be taken as it is, and regarded these other institutions as rational? Or would Hegel say, in the case where these other institutions existed, that they will inevitably degenerate, ultimately to be replaced by the rational institutions outlined in his *Philosophy of Right*? When Hegel suggests that a modern state that is democratic will fail, to what extent is he being empirical? Hegel's claim about democracy is not only of intrinsic interest, but is also relevant to the broader interpretive question concerning Hegel's philosophy of history of whether Hegel truly is an empiricist historian and is willing to accept the relativist implications of an empirical approach.

Hegel's Claim about Democracy

Democracy can be understood in a variety of ways, some of which are in conflict.¹ It can mean rule by the people, usually through majority vote; but it can also mean protection of individual rights and liberties, which sometimes requires that we restrict majority rule.² Hegel understands democracy generally to refer to a form of government in which the citizen is in some sense "present at the critical stages of public business" (*PH*, 255). Athens was democratic though only one in ten Athenians was a citizen, because those who were citizens took part. Not all forms of democracy rely solely on voting as the means for taking part: the Athenians, for example, used a lottery to select some public officials. But Hegel singles out deliberation followed by voting as essential features of modern democracy. For Hegel, democracy in a modern state refers to a form of government in which "[t]he interests of the community, the affairs of State, shall be discussed and decided by the People . . . [and] the individual members of the community shall deliberate, urge their respective opinions, and give their votes" (*PH*, 252).

Hegel's claim that democracy is proper for the Athenian polis but inappropriate for a modern state illustrates his view that "the constitution of a specific nation will in general depend on the nature and development of its self-consciousness" (*PR*, §274). Democracy is appropriate for the Greeks because they lacked subjective consciousness and the institutions of civil society that promote the expression of particular wills: "The citizens are still unconscious of particular interests, and therefore of a

corrupting element" (*PH*, 252; *VPG*, 308). Where Greek subjectivity (*Fürsichsein*) did exist, it was confined to "artists and scholars who were indifferent to politics" (*RPH* I, 199).

In the section *Moralität* of his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel explains that the moral agent with subjectivity wills that he himself is in everything he does (*PR*, §107). Persons with subjective consciousness see themselves as determining their own aims. When they focus on themselves to the exclusion of the universal, they reveal a defect, which Hegel refers to as the "abstraction of subjectivity." Athenian citizens, on Hegel's view, lacking subjectivity, did not have this defect. They had as their object of interest not themselves as individuals, but their polis.³ Just as important, the Greeks lacked a civil society, and therefore a means by which they could outwardly express their particularity. Democracy did not have subversive effects because the Greeks, lacking subjectivity and civil society, did not place individual, particular interests above the welfare of the community.

Hegel associates democracy in a modern state with the principle of individual sovereignty, the principle that the individual should be determined not "by any consideration of what others are doing, but only by his own will, and that his arbitrary will as an individual is the ultimate and sovereign principle which befits him and to which he is entitled."⁴ Hegel emphasizes how Greek political thought, as expressed by Aristotle, is opposed to the modern principle of individual sovereignty:

Aristotle does not place the individual and his rights first, but recognizes the state as what in its essence is higher than the individual and the family, for the very reason that it constitutes their substantiality. . . . This is directly antagonistic to the modern principle in which the particular will of the individual, as absolute, is made the starting point, so that all men by giving their votes, decide what is to be the law, and thereby a commonweal is brought into existence. (*HP*, 208)

Democracy was appropriate for the Greeks because for them, democratic participation involved expressing the collective interest of the polis and not the principle of individual sovereignty, a principle that Hegel thinks subverts the state.

Hegel states his claim in stronger terms when he says not merely that a democratic constitution was appropriate for the Athenians, but that it was "the only possible one" (*VPG*, 308: "*die einzig mögliche*"). Hegel's claim that democracy was not merely appropriate but necessary

for the Athenians is puzzling, given the existence of city states contemporary with Athens with similar features such as a “common culture” and small size (*PH*, 255) but that were not democratic.⁵

There are two ways we might understand Hegel’s claim. Democracy may have been necessary in order for humans to advance beyond the limits of Greek culture and society. Hegel says that the “justification and absolute necessity of the democratic constitution of the Greeks rests on the still immanent, objective ethical life” that lacks the corrupting element of particular interests that have not yet developed (*VPG*, 308). He argues that the democratic, along with the aristocratic and monarchical structures of government,

must . . . be regarded as necessary structures in the path of development—in short, in the history of the State. Hence it is superficial and absurd to represent them as an object of choice. The pure forms—*necessary to the process of evolution*—are, in so far as they are finite and in course of change, conjoined both with forms of their degeneration. (*PM*, §544, 272; emphasis added)

Hegel doesn’t explain how Athenian democracy was necessary for the eventual rise of subjectivity that led to the downfall of the Greek polis and paved the path of world spirit. He might refer to the necessity apparent in hindsight: the Greeks played an instrumental role in the development of the Idea in history, and so features they shared must have been essential. Perhaps a more promising account Hegel might have suggested is that democratic practices such as speeches in public assemblies and other public discourse would have provided the impetus and opportunity for the sophists and Socrates to develop the principle of subjectivity that Hegel claims is essential for human freedom, and for their newly emerging principle to clash with the existent principles of Greek ethical life, a clash prompting historical evolution.⁶ Hegel does note that the democratic constitution “affords the widest scope for the development of great political characters” in allowing the display of their powers and summoning them to use those powers for the general welfare; it also requires that one be able to satisfy the intellect, judgment, and passions of the people in order to obtain influence (*PH*, 260): “In a democracy it is a matter of the first importance, to be able to speak in popular assemblies—to urge one’s opinions on public matters” (*PH*, 268). Of course, unlike the sophists, Socrates was uncomfortable speaking in large assemblies, preferring instead to engage in one-on-one dialogue, and the Assembly’s verdict against him, recounted

by Plato in the *Apology*, indicates his inability to satisfy the passions of most Athenians. Hegel is best understood to refer to others with great political character, but not Socrates, who said he avoided politics.⁷ Still, Socrates may have been able to develop his subversive form of dialogue only because Athens was democratic.

On another interpretation, democracy was necessary for the Greeks in the sense that it cohered with their other practices. Hegel singles out three features of the ancient Greek republics: an appeal to oracles for making decisions such as where to found a colony or how to conduct a battle; slavery, which Hegel says is "a necessary condition of an aesthetic democracy" in providing the freedom to citizens to take part in public activities; and their small size, which allows for the interests of all to be similar and for a common culture and living polity to be possible (*PH*, 254–55). The necessity of democracy, on this interpretation, is a necessity for interpretive coherence: democracy is needed to make sense of Greek ethical life as an integral system.

When Hegel spoke of democracy in Athens, he had in mind direct democracy: each member of the demos is "present at the critical stages of public business, he must take part in decisive crises with his entire personality—not with his vote merely" (*PH*, 255). Hegel claims that democracy can't take the same form in modern times, when a living democratic polity is no longer possible.⁸ But Hegel's criticism of democracy in a modern state is not that it is impossible because the large number of people make face to face interaction implausible; Hegel is aware of forms of democracy other than direct democracy that could function in a modern state. To understand Hegel's critique of democracy we shall need to review two of his most important works of political theory, and distinguish two different sorts of arguments. For now his position can be briefly summarized as follows: In allowing individual wills to express themselves through the vote, a modern democratic constitution recognizes the importance only of expressing particular wills. Democracy fails to recognize the importance of mediating the particular will with the universal, and the extent to which the individual is part of a system of complete interdependence. For Hegel, democracy in a modern state consists in individuals collecting temporarily for a single act, believing that their own particular interests, "whim, opinion, and caprice" are all that counts (*PR*, §281, Rem.), after which they disperse until the next occasion for collective action. This practice, he argues, is inappropriate to a modern state because "[civil society] is not split up into individual atomic units which are merely assembled for a moment to perform a single temporary act . . . on the contrary, it is articulated into its associations, communities, and corporations" (*PR*, §308).

Hegel presents his critique of democracy both in the *Philosophy of Right* and in another essay offering an even more extensive treatment of the failings of democracy, "The English Reform Bill." The Reform Bill proposed to expand English political representation, so that the majority of the House of Commons would no longer be "controlled by 150 persons of eminence" (RB, 236). Hegel recognizes that the proposed reforms might increase the chance for some positive changes, such as land reform and an end to church tithes and hunting rights (RB, 242–43, 248–49), though he thinks such results remain unlikely in England (RB, 248–49). But Hegel is concerned that England's constitution lacks a structure to mediate the power that the radical reformers would place in Parliament. While the English constitution ostensibly was a monarchy, in fact the monarchic power was "more illusory than real," the real power lying with Parliament (RB, 261). Because it was so weak, "the monarchic element in England lacks the power which, in other states, has facilitated the transition, without convulsions, violence, and robbery," from earlier forms of legislation based on positive rights and privileges, to legislation "based on principles of real freedom" (RB, 269). The Reform Bill rightly tries to improve upon a system of government that rests on unprincipled traditions and prescriptive rights with no other justification than that they have existed for a long time; but it would open the door for "new people" who would introduce "heterogeneous principles" and "claims of a new kind" that could "threaten to become increasingly dangerous" (RB, 268–69). Hegel worries especially about reformers who appeal to the abstract rights of man and argue that the people should express their will by choosing those who govern: such a theory provides no assurance that England will be governed by those with talent and competence, as would a more rational constitution in which service to the state is tied to preconditions such as "a course of specialized [*wissenschaftlicher*] study, state-approved examinations, preliminary practical training, etc." (RB, 263). Hegel has no high opinion of the existing members of the House:

The English nation has not yet achieved through popular representation what several centuries of quiet work in the cultivation of science, and of princely wisdom and love of justice have accomplished in Germany; . . . Nowhere but in England is the prejudice so entrenched and sincerely accepted that if birth and wealth give someone an office, they also give him the intelligence to go with it. (RB, 250)

But the new bill offers no improvement; it is "devoid of those particular elements which might allow well founded insight and genuine

knowledge to prevail over the crass ignorance of the fox-hunters and rural gentry, over an education acquired merely through social contacts, newspapers, and parliamentary debates" (*RB*, 250)

In "The English Reform Bill," Hegel recommends a structure of government in which "issues rather than individuals" are voiced and given a hearing (*RB*, 254). The democratic reforms proposed in England rest on the principle of individual sovereignty—"the modern principle according to which only the abstract will of individuals as such should be represented" (*RB*, 253). But this principle is inappropriate in a rational modern state, which is a differentiated unity in which the various classes that make up the state have their corporate interests represented (*RB*, 253). In *Philosophy of Right* Hegel develops in detail the theory of a modern state as a differentiated unity. A rational modern state has a hereditary monarch guided by a cabinet of experts at its head, and a bicameral assembly with one house consisting of landed property interests who earn their role through inheriting property rather than by being elected (*PR*, §§305–306), and the other house consisting of deputies who are elected not by an undifferentiated electorate, but by corporations (*PR*, §§308, 311). Hegel rejects democracy even in the form of elective monarchy, in favor of a constitution that has "real rationality," in which "each of the three moments of the concept has its distinctive shape" (*PR*, §279). An elective monarchy where the people are entrusted with choosing who they charge with their welfare mistakenly makes decisive the capricious will of the people. But "to know what one wills, and even more to know what the will which has being in and for itself—i.e. reason—wills, is the fruit of profound cognition and insight, and this is the very thing which 'the people' lack" (*PR*, §301, Rem.; cf. *PR*, §268Z).

While Hegel does not think the people should have a voice in electing the monarch, he recognizes the importance of representation through the Estates (*PR*, §301). The Estates are a "mediating organ," where the "interests of particular circles and individuals" are presented to the government at large. Hegel's support of corporate representation might seem to conflict with his argument that particular interests shouldn't undermine the unity of the state, especially given examples with which we are familiar where central authority is undermined by parochial interests of clans or tribes.⁹ But on Hegel's view, representatives serve corporate rather than geographically based interests.¹⁰ Corporations ultimately contribute to allegiance to the state and central authority, and support the rule of law, because corporate interests, for Hegel, are *not* parochial allegiances to clans or tribes of the sort that challenge official loyalties.¹¹

The true function of the representative institution in a modern state, for Hegel, is precisely the opposite of what many of the English reformers conceived it to be: it is to “ensure that individuals do not present themselves as a crowd or aggregate, unorganized in their opinions and volition, and do not become a massive power in opposition to the organic state” (*PR*, §302). Even in the event that representatives were to advance individual rather than corporate interests, their potential corrupting influence is limited: Hegel distinguishes the Estate assemblies from a legislative power because the monarch and his cabinet retain the final decision, and legislation only modifies existing laws and deals with “minutiae of detail,” with the “main drift” already settled by law-courts (*PM*, §544, 274).

The principle Hegel understands modern democracies to advance, individual sovereignty, conflicts with the principle of differentiated unity. Hegel criticizes democracy because he thinks it would subvert the state as a differentiated unity not only in theory but in practice. In the *Philosophy of Mind* Hegel writes that the principles of liberty and equality associated with democratic institutions and the principle of individual sovereignty, “if stuck to in this abstract form, [a]re principles which either prevent the rise of the concreteness of the state, i.e. its articulation into a constitution and a government in general, or destroy them” (*PM*, §539). In the very last line of “The English Reform Bill” Hegel suggests that the proposed democratic reforms in England could destroy the state, could “inaugurate not a reform but a revolution.”¹²

Hegel’s unwillingness to provide a potentially meaningful form of political participation to most citizens has been a cause of great concern.¹³ He believes that democratic participation threatens the unity of the state. In the next section I distinguish two sorts of arguments Hegel invokes to reach this conclusion.

Two Sorts of Arguments against Democracy

Hegel argues that democratic institutions totalize the principle of individual sovereignty, preventing the mediation of individual needs within a unified state. This is an empirical claim, presumably based on the observed consequences of democratic practices, a claim I shall turn to in the fourth section. This critique of democracy in practice can be distinguished from a second sort of argument Hegel advances: democracy rests on a false conception of the state, one that totalizes civil society. On this argument, Hegel objects on metaphysical grounds to institutions that give priority to particular wills and subjectivity over corporate and universal interests. To make sense of this argument, we must understand

why Hegel thinks it wrong to totalize particularity and subjective consciousness—to see the state as only civil society.

The essential difference between the modern state and the state of classical antiquity, for Hegel, is that in the modern state the “universal is bound up with the complete freedom of its particular members and with private well-being” (*PR*, §260Z). In civil society, an essential moment of the modern state that was absent in ancient Greece, individuals are conscious of themselves as individuals with particular needs, and become conscious that these needs are fulfilled through a process of mediation involving institutions including businesses and corporations, schools, the police, and the administration of justice. This process of mediation is what binds the particular members to the “universal.” Civil society is only one moment of a state, not to be mistaken for the state. We are not to think that the reason we live in a state is to fulfill our particular needs. It is within the sphere of civil society itself that such an understanding is exposed as false (*PR*, §182Z; cf. *PR*, §207).

Hegel wants us to recognize how civil society is a means by which we recognize the limitations of particularity and the error in totalizing subjective consciousness:

[C]ivil society, in which the Idea has lost itself in particularity and split up into the division between inward and outward, returns to its concept, to the unity of the universal which has being in itself with subjective particularity. (*PR*, §229)

Here Hegel draws on his metaphysical commitment to the view that human beings are spirit (*Geist*) and history the record of spirit's path of self-recognition. In regarding themselves as merely individuals with particular wills, and regarding the state atomistically, those who defend the principle of individual sovereignty take a viewpoint “that excludes Spirit, because it leads only to an aggregation, whereas spirit is not something individual but the unity of the individual and the universal” (*PR*, §156Z). Hegel hopes for us to recognize that spirit is the “substantial and underlying essence” of man, and to put this objective truth above the “trivialities of external existence and contingency” (*PM*, §549; cf. *PS*, 43). By participating in the institutions of civil society we come to see ourselves as part of a universal community of spirit (cf. *PR*, §249). Democratic institutions, on Hegel's view, are premised on a way of understanding the state that fails to recognize this essential purpose of civil society.

Hegel sees history as human beings' development, through appropriate institutions, of a self-understanding of themselves as free. Hegel believes subjectivity is necessary for humans to recognize they are fully

free: man, unlike animals, raises “himself above the singleness of sensation to the universality of thought, to self-knowledge, to the grasp of his subjectivity, of his ‘I’ ” (*PM*, §381Z). By virtue of this capacity, humans can realize they are spirit. But subjectivity must not be totalized. A state that adopts institutions that give play only to subjectivity and particularity fails to help its citizens develop an adequate self-understanding, leaving them with an abstract or incomplete, and untrue form of consciousness. Because the Athenians lacked subjectivity, they could have democracy. But, on Hegel’s view, because modern democracy necessarily expresses only subjectivity and particularity, modern democratic states fail to satisfy the demands of the Idea.

Hegel’s Empirical Argument against Democracy in a Modern State

If Hegel’s account of history is empirical in some sense, we might expect that his suggestion that democracy will fail in a modern state because it totalizes the principle of individual sovereignty is not presupposed but is established by observing democratic practices. To what extent does Hegel support his claim about democracy with empirical observations?

In the “English Reform Bill,” Hegel infers from only a few observations of an actual democratic society that the proposed democratic reforms would fail. He criticizes the proposed reforms because they would allow incompetents to decide on important affairs through a process open to corruption, echoing the Duke of Wellington’s worry that the Reform Bill would allow “shopkeepers” to make decisions on domestic and foreign affairs (*RB*, 263). To support this fear, Hegel points to Brougham’s description of a scene where people were rounded up by the owners of great estates, “made to camp in the courtyards with fires, pudding, and porter—to isolate them from the influence of opposition,” and kept until they were to cast their vote (*RB*, 257; cf. *PH*, 455, on “election to seats in parliament by means of bribery”). Hegel also points to what he sees as the empirical reality of an uninformed, corruptible electorate, whose slack attendance of electoral meetings and low voter turnout suggests they are indifferent as well (*RB*, 258–59). These observations of voting behavior in England, Hegel argues, belie the principle underlying the vote, that it manifests the people’s sovereignty and “right to participate in public affairs,” and is a “supreme duty” (*RB*, 257). Hegel does not explain why the voter indifference he observes would not temper the potentially destructive effects of democracy.

Hegel appeals to experience or observation in a few other passages to support his claim about democracy in a modern state. He says that

"experience shows" that England, which is regarded as among the most democratic nations, in which private persons "have a predominant share in public affairs," is "the most backward" in its civil and criminal law, liberty of property, and arrangements for art and science; in England, objective freedom is "sacrificed to formal right and particular interest" (*PM*, §544, 273)—but he provides no evidence of this backwardness or that it is due to excessive particularity resulting from democratic practices. In *Philosophy of Right* he cites Montesquieu's observations that England in the seventeenth century had a weak democracy because ambition replaced virtue: "[T]he state falls prey to universal exploitation and its strength resides solely in the power of a few individuals and the unruliness of everyone" (*PR*, §273, 310). In *Philosophy of History* he supports his claim that democracy fails in modern times by pointing to the French Convention after the Revolution, at which governance broke down and despotism resulted (*PH*, 255–56; cf. *RPH* V, 804). But he fails to show that democratic practices in non-extraordinary times, or constitutional democracies, are likely to fail.

An essential goal of many of the English reformers seeking greater democratization is that the individual should be guided solely by his own will, and that each individual, through the vote, shapes the state to suit himself. Hegel opposes this goal, but also makes the point that the democratizing reforms will never realize their ideal of individual sovereignty given the modern state's size (*PR*, §311, Rem.). Hegel calculated that "the individual vote" was a "ninety-millionth of one of the three branches of the power which makes the law" (*RB*, 257). Of course, in modern democracies individuals form coalitions and parties that increase their voice. In criticizing democracy for a modern state, Hegel seems to rule out a pluralist or a party system, where individuals express a will representing not an isolated individual but a particular plurality, or what Rousseau calls a "corporate will" (*SC* 3:2, 177). Rousseau, who agrees with Hegel that "nothing is more dangerous than the influence of private interests on public affairs" (*SC* 3:4, 179), theorizes a regime where voting concerns only general objects, not particular matters (*SC* 2:4, 157), and in which people detach their private from the common interest, and in considering a proposed law are asked not "whether they approve or reject, but whether or not it conforms to the general will that is theirs" (*SC* 4:2, 206). Hegel, unlike Rousseau, does not envision a practice of democracy in a modern state that would diverge from the principle of individual sovereignty.¹⁴

Why not? Why doesn't Hegel consider the possibility that rational people will come to see that their best chance to realize their will is to organize in groups or parties where their particular will is no longer a trivial fraction? The logistical problem that a single vote becomes trivial

in a large state can be avoided by a party system in which individuals cluster in groups whose members have fairly similar interests and preferences and negotiate policies of compromise with groups having opposing preferences. Hegel equated modern democracy with a system consisting of atomistic units expressing their subjective volitions. He did not consider how rational alliances, be they strategic and self-interested, or ideological, could avoid the particularism he assumed would destroy the state's unity. In one passage from lecture notes of his *Rechtsphilosophie*, Hegel apparently recognizes the potential significance of political parties: "[W]ith parties, one's voice becomes important" (*RPH* VI, 718). He concludes, however, that parties are potentially destructive because they allow "passion" to enter into politics ("*so tritt der Eifer ein*"), a point recorded in another set of lecture notes on the *Rechtsphilosophie* when Hegel asserts that the rise of political parties entails the dominance of particular interests that can lead to war or seizure by foreign hands, a result, he says, from which Germany was spared only through divine Providence.¹⁵

Hegel's unwillingness to conceive of a democracy that focused on the universal interest is apparent in his reading of Rousseau's *Social Contract*. For Rousseau,

The substantial basis and primary factor is supposed to be not the will as rational will which has being in and for itself or the spirit as true spirit, but will and spirit as the particular individual, as the will of the single person in his distinctive arbitrariness. (*PR*, §29, Rem.)

Rousseau considered the will only in the determinate form of the individual will . . . and regarded the universal will not as the will's rationality in and for itself, but only as the common element arising out of this individual will as a conscious will. The union of individuals within the state thus becomes a contract, which is accordingly based on their arbitrary will and opinions, and on their express consent . . . the further consequences which follow from this, and which relate merely to the understanding, destroy the divine which has being in and for itself and its absolute authority and majesty. (*PR*, §258, Rem.)

Hegel is so locked into an understanding of democracy as necessarily totalizing the principle of individual sovereignty that he seems unable to see the passages in which Rousseau articulates a vision of democracy involving "the total alienation of each associate, together

with all of his rights, to the entire community" (*SC* 1:6, 148). Hegel was unable to conceive of democracy as capable of coexisting within a corporatist structure in which citizens had civic consciousness and could be mediated with the universal. Why did he assume democracy necessarily is governed by the principle of individual sovereignty and leads to the dissolution of the state? Hegel points to empirical evidence of how individuals express their wills through the vote, but his evidence is anecdotal and meager, and so it is hard to believe that he was led to his conclusions about democracy in a modern state by his observations of political behavior.

Hegel's weakness as an empiricist political scientist is apparent by comparing one of his arguments against elective and for hereditary monarchy with Thomas Paine's objection to hereditary monarchy. Hegel argues that hereditary monarchy is rational because by having the monarch decided by "nature" and not by political deliberations or in-fighting, conflicts among factions are avoided (*PR*, §281, Rem.). This is by no means Hegel's only defense of hereditary monarchy, and he explicitly disavows that this is its primary ground.¹⁶ But it is an important one, and an argument that Paine anticipates and rejects with a far more effective empiricism. Paine observes that there are more civil wars resulting from contested hereditary claims than ever arose from elections. Paine provides the example of Poland, which "though an elective monarchy, has had fewer wars than those which are hereditary."¹⁷ Even Paine's woefully slim data set is more impressive than what Hegel assembles for establishing a correlation between elections and regime breakdown. Hegel points only to intuitive arguments about the effect of a vote when there is a large electorate, and anecdotal evidence about corruption, indifference, and competence, without ever establishing that democratic polities are more likely to fail. Indeed, he fails to explain how the particularism to which democracy gives play would still effectively destroy the unity of the state if voters are, as he claims, indifferent and disengaged. Paine at least compares observable outcomes of democratic and nondemocratic regimes.

Despite Hegel's claim that the historian should proceed empirically, and that we should not imagine how the world ought to be but instead reflect on what has already transpired, he did not convincingly base his claim about the failure of democracies in modern states on observations of democratic practices in England or elsewhere. Hegel's criticism of modern democracy is left to rest on his rejection of the principle of individual sovereignty:

The idea that all individuals ought to participate in deliberations and decisions on the universal concerns of the

state—on the grounds that they are all members of the state and that the concerns of the state are the concerns of everyone . . . appears plausible precisely because it stops short at the abstract determination of membership of the state and because superficial thinking sticks to abstractions. . . . The concrete state is the whole, articulated into its particular circles. (*PR*, §308, Rem., 247)

This raises a question about the extent to which Hegel's philosophy of history really is empirical.

Hegel's Claim about Democracy and His Philosophy of History

To justify his claim that democracy is inadequate for a modern state, Hegel appeals to his corporatist theory of the state as a differentiated unity, and to his philosophy of history, which he claims is in some sense empirical. Hegel, committed to showing the rationality of the actual (*PR*, Preface, 20), rejects elective monarchy or other democratic forms of government because they were not features of the modern state he regarded as actual. His reason for thinking they were not was his conviction that democracy necessarily expresses a principle of individual sovereignty destructive of the state. This is a problematic view given the existence of successful democratic elements in some European states and in the United States: democracy had not necessarily led to the folding of regimes or to revolutions.¹⁸

Hegel might have made an empirical argument that virtue is unlikely in a large state and, like some political scientists, ruled out a successful Rousseauian democracy as improbable.¹⁹ But his observations of actual democracies do not constitute what political scientists would regard as adequate empirical evidence. This is not necessarily a criticism of Hegel, whose intentions and goals differ from those of a political scientist seeking to explain political behavior and outcomes. What, though, becomes of Hegel's claim that the historian must proceed empirically?

The sense in which Hegel means philosophical history is empirical can of course be distinguished from the sense in which a political scientist proceeds empirically when evaluating the effectiveness of democratic practices by observing their consequences. In saying philosophical history is empirical, Hegel means to deny that one can read history however one pleases: one is constrained by facts. But Hegel at the same time denies there are "brute facts" independent of our theories about the world,

which is why he criticizes “original” and defends a philosophical method of history. Hegel claims that his philosophical system gives an account of both the logical and temporal development of Spirit (cf. *PH*, 72). Hegel refuses to justify this claim by faith or unfounded convictions. That history is rational and not a random series of events will be seen by one who intelligently reflects back on history. His approach requires sometimes bracketing what one can observe in the world and regarding it as not “actual” even though it exists, and it is precisely this rejection of brute-fact empiricism that makes Hegel’s political theory so powerful as a strategy of immanent criticism.²⁰

But the discussion of his claim about democracy suggests a problem with this approach. Hegel’s metaphysical argument against democracy assumes that democracy necessarily expresses a principle destructive to the modern state. *If* democracy does indeed express only the principle of individual sovereignty, it would violate a central tenet of Hegel’s dialectical system. It would totalize one moment, subjectivity, and exclude another moment essential to the Idea. But the claim that democracy necessarily embodies the principle of individual sovereignty is fundamentally an empirical claim—it is a claim about how people behave given certain institutions. In ignoring nondemocratic Greek institutions, and democratic practices of modern states that do not disrupt the state, Hegel might claim that they exist but are not actual, in that they don’t accord with his account of what a rational state was in ancient Greece or is in modern times. But the political scientist will take issue with Hegel’s conclusion that modern democratic practices necessarily lead to regime failures. In drawing conclusions about what democracy must be on such scanty observations, Hegel is left with a claim against democracy resting on an assumption—that democracy necessarily expresses the principle of individual sovereignty—that is not convincingly supported by empirical evidence.

Hegel may have been too quick to reject democratic practices. He says “there can be no further discussion” of democracy “in face of the developed Idea” (*PR*, §279, Rem., 319); and though at times he seems to reject democratic institutions because of the destructive consequences he thinks they have, he says he regards as irrelevant considerations such as the utility of an institution because “the one thing which we must bear in mind is the internal necessity of the Idea” (*PR*, §279Z, 321). But it is unclear whether Hegel needed to regard democracy as inconsistent with the Idea. His constrained understanding of the possibilities of democracy, and his ignoring of nondemocratic Greek politics and nondestructive democratic practices of modern states, suggests that at least in his view of democracy, Hegel shaped his understanding of existing practices so

that it conformed to his ideal. But it would not have been inconsistent with his philosophy of history for Hegel to rework his understanding of an ideal, rational state if institutions such as democracy, which he does not regard as rational, had historically developed instead.²¹

Notes

1. Some have argued that democracy is an “essentially contested concept”—see W. B. Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” in *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (London: 1964); originally in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1955–56; and Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999), 20.

2. Ball and Dagger, 40.

3. See *PH*, 253: The Greeks “had no conscience; the habit of living for their country without further reflection, was the principle dominant among them”; and *PR*, §279Z: In Athens, “self-consciousness had not yet arrived at the abstraction of subjectivity, nor had it yet realized that an ‘I will’ must be pronounced by man himself on the issue to be decided.” Cf. Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 111–12, 162, 225–26.

4. *RB*, 258; cf. *RB*, 253: “the modern principle according to which only the abstract will of individuals as such should be represented”; and *RB*, 259: “the right [of the franchise] was accepted as by definition sovereign, primary, inalienable, and generally the opposite of all that can be conferred or taken away.” In *Philosophy of Right* Hegel refers to this principle mainly when criticizing it: see *PR*, §301, Rem., 340; *PR*, §303, Rem.; and *PR*, §309Z: “it is not essential that the individual should have a say as an abstract individual entity.”

5. Hegel, though, suggests that the democratic constitution was the primary form of government in Greece (*PH*, 250). He concedes that the government of Sparta was “almost an aristocracy and oligarchy” and that the power of the Ephors became tyrannical; but he says that the Spartan constitution may still be called democratic (*PH*, 263).

6. For Hegel, Socrates’ death marked the rise of subjective consciousness that began with the sophists, “who first introduced subjective reflection” (*PH*, 253). Cf. *PR*, §138, Rem., and §279, Rem., 320.

7. Plato, *Apology*, 31c5–31; but see Plato, *Gorgias*, 521d, where Socrates says he alone practices politics, probably meaning he alone improves the character of his fellow Athenians, through his one-on-one discussions with them.

8. Avineri, 163. See also Andrew Buchwalter, “Hegel’s Concept of Virtue,” *Political Theory* 20, no. 548–83 (November 1992): 553–54, 574–75, on how the “systematic bifurcation” of modern societies makes impossible the rehabilitation of Greek republicanism.

9. See, for example, Steven Erlanger, “Loyalties Clash, Exposing Rifts in Unruly Gaza,” *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 2005, on how clan loyalties in Gaza undermine the central Palestinian Authority.

10. Hardimon, 222; and Buchwalter, 571.

11. See *PR*, §§252, 255. Andrew Buchwalter, in arguing that corporate benevolence does not provide a genuine account of civic virtue, suggests a different position: that Hegel thinks corporate membership can be based on “tribal kinship” (Buchwalter, 560). The reason I differ is that Hegel says corporations “admit members in accordance with their objective qualification of skill and rectitude,” and he distinguishes the tie to corporations from the tie to family by referring to the corporation as “a *second* family” (*PR*, §252) and by speaking of family as the first ethical root of the state, and the corporation as the second (*PR*, §255).

12. *RB*, 270. But earlier Hegel admitted to not being too concerned that England would be influenced by “the fanaticism” associated with commitment to the abstract rights of man, given the “so-called practical sense of the British nation” (*RB*, 255).

13. E.g., Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 255; and Dudley Knowles, *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right* (London: Routledge, 2002), 335.

14. It is unclear whether Rousseau felt that the model of voting he theorizes could be put into practice in actual states. Rousseau does not want to give up on ideals simply because they have not taken hold (*SC* 4:1, 204; yet he concedes that he does not see his proposed solution as possible “unless the city is very small” and while he doesn't think small states are impossible, he defers discussion of why until later, and then explains that he never addresses the concern as he hoped he would (*SC* 3:15, 199–200 and fn 14).

15. *RPH* III, 247–48; Cf. *PR*, §281, Rem.: while not focusing on political parties, Hegel says that by making particular wills the basis of selecting rulers, “the state is dissolved from within and destroyed from without.”

16. See Mark Tunick, “Hegel's Justification of Hereditary Monarchy,” *History of Political Thought* 12 (1991):481–96.

17. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), 115–16.

18. In one reference to American democracy in his *Rechtsphilosophie* lectures a student records, cryptically, that Hegel dismisses the American case as “not really an instance” of democracy because America lacks a developed civil society and has “no true commerce” (*RPH* V, 751).

19. Robert Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 148.

20. See *PR*, Preface, 20. Hegel explains his distinction between actuality and existence in *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830), vol. 1, §6. On Hegel's immanent criticism, see Mark Tunick, *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and on immanent criticism generally, see Tunick, *Punishment: Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

21. I thank Joshua Cohen for his invaluable guidance when I first approached Hegel's views on democracy.

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PART IV

The Philosophy of
History and Religion

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Hegel's Philosophy of World History as Theodicy

On Evil and Freedom

Pierre Chételat

My objective in this chapter is to explore what Hegel means when he claims that the philosophy of history is theodicy.¹ Most often associated with Leibniz, the term *theodicy* means literally a justification of God, or, as Hegel puts it, “a justification of the ways of God.”² The principal task of theodicy is to address the problem of evil that arises when one claims, on the one hand, that a good and omnipotent God exists, and when one acknowledges, on the other hand, that there is evil in the world. These two claims appear incompatible and the challenge for the philosopher engaging in theodicy is to explain why such a God would allow evil to exist.

In the 1830 manuscript, Hegel introduces the topic of theodicy as follows:

The aim of human cognition is to understand that the intentions of eternal wisdom are accomplished not only in the natural world, but also in the realm of the [spirit] which is actively present in the world. From this point of view, our investigation can be seen as a theodicy, a justification of the ways of God (such as Leibniz attempted in his own metaphysical manner, but using categories which were as yet abstract and indeterminate). It should enable us to comprehend all

the ills of the world, including the existence of evil, so that the thinking spirit may be reconciled with the negative aspects of existence; and it is in world history that we encounter the sum total of concrete evil.³

This passage leaves us with the impression that Hegel's theodicean project is essentially the same as Leibniz's. In other words, it seems that, like Leibniz, Hegel intends his theodicy to address the problem of evil. It is certainly true that for Hegel there are particular events that are a necessary part of history's development and are therefore justified. However, I will argue that when Hegel claims that the philosophy of history is theodicy, he does not pretend to have resolved the problem of evil but has a different philosophical project in mind. For Hegel, the philosophy of history is theodicy first and foremost because it demonstrates that God is at work in the world and that this work leads ultimately to a state in which evil or suffering can be overcome.

The Philosophy of History as a Response to the Problem of Evil

At first glance, it is puzzling that Hegel would claim that the philosophy of history is theodicy. One might expect him to associate theodicy with theology or metaphysics, since God is an object of study in these disciplines, but normally the focus of history is not on God but on human events. Hegel helps to resolve this puzzle when he tells us that God is at work in history. As he writes, "History is the unfolding of God's nature in a particular, determinate element."⁴ For Hegel the task of the philosophy of history is to show *how* God is active in history's development. This explains why the philosophy of history can be theodicy: insofar as it deals with the role of God in history, the philosophy of history has God's activity as its subject matter.

What does Hegel mean by the term *God* when he claims that history is the unfolding of God's determinate nature? I cannot address this question here in detail, but I must take a position on it. As a number of scholars have already argued effectively, the God that Hegel is referring to here is not the transcendent, autonomous creator of traditional Christianity.⁵ Hegel's God is not one who plays a role in history by determining the course of historical events from beyond as a puppet master determines the actions of his marionettes.⁶ In Hegel's philosophy of history, God is reason both as Idea and as spirit. As the latter, God is reason as it manifests itself in the events of world history. When Hegel

says that history is the unfolding of God's nature, or when he claims alternatively that world history is governed by providence, he is simply expressing in religious language what he takes to be the fundamental claim and the starting point of the philosophy of history, namely, that history does not consist of a mass of purely contingent events, but that it develops in a necessary way.⁷ God is at work in history insofar as history is rational, and the primary task of the philosophy of history is to show how it is rational. For Hegel, the reason governing the process of history is teleological: historical development is not only necessary, but it proceeds necessarily toward a final purpose.⁸ For Hegel the final goal of world history is the realization of freedom, the conditions for which are achieved when history reaches the period of the modern European world.

This outline of how Hegel conceives of the role of reason in world history is brief, but it is sufficient to give an initial indication of what Hegel means when he claims that the philosophy of history is theodicy. Contrary perhaps to first appearances, his claim is not that the philosophy of history examines the role played in the world by a transcendent God. It does not attempt to explain how the existence of evil can be reconciled with the existence of an omnipotent, benevolent being. Rather, if God for Hegel is reason, then the philosophy of history is theodicy insofar as it considers the role of reason in the development of history. To the extent that the philosophy of history provides a solution to the problem of evil, it does so by giving a justification of reason. Reason for Hegel is the good, and in the domain of spirit, in the sphere of human history and culture, reason itself determines or guides the process through which freedom or the good is actualized. Yet there is also evil in the world. If Hegel's philosophy of history is to resolve the problem of evil, it must reconcile in some way the existence of evil with reason that governs the development of history. It must explain how it is possible for evil to exist in a world that is governed by reason and that is ultimately good.

How then does Hegel's philosophy of history attempt to address the problem of evil? According to one response, the philosophy of history is theodicy because it shows how evil events in history are a necessary means for achieving a higher end. Hegel himself suggests that evil plays this role: "So we have to consider world history and what its final purpose may be; this final purpose is what God wanted with the world. For this final purpose all sacrifices upon the altar of the world are brought."⁹ The progress of world history leads ultimately to a stage in which humans are able to be fully free for the first time, but this freedom can only be actualized as the result of a long development, and

evil is inevitably a part of this development. The evil of history occurs both at the level of individuals and of whole peoples; it includes the tragedy that accompanies the downfall of great civilizations, as well as the suffering of the individuals who fall prey to history's momentous events and other sorts of evil. According to what I will refer to as the means/end view, the philosophy of history is theodicy because it shows that certain evil events are a required part of the historical process that results in freedom and so are justified.¹⁰ Hegel's view presupposes that although this evil is regrettable, it ought to have happened. According to the means/end interpretation, Hegel would say that it is better for humanity to become fully free and to suffer evil along the way than it would be for humanity to avoid this evil at the expense of freedom.

Hegel believes that the philosophy of history can provide some justification for the evil that occurs in the course of the world's historical development. But if we take this to be the explanation of how the philosophy of history functions as theodicy, then I think that it attributes to Hegel a theodicy that is, at best, weak or incomplete. There are three ways in which Hegel's theodicy in this interpretation falls short of providing a full response to the problem of evil. First, the philosophy of history is able to justify the evil of some historical occurrences, but not others. The events that it can justify are world-historical events, since these are necessary moments in the development of world spirit. For example, the civil war in which Julius Caesar prevailed as emperor brought about a major political transition in history and constitutes for Hegel an "inherently necessary determination in the history of Rome and of the world."¹¹ Like all wars it involved evil and suffering, but because this evil was required for the development of freedom, it is justified according to the means/end account of Hegel's theodicy. However, not all large-scale events in history involving evil are of such great significance, and presumably one would have a hard time arguing that all were necessary for spirit's development toward freedom. As a result, Hegel's theodicy is in these cases unable to explain why this evil was required. The same applies even more strongly to the actions of individuals. Caesar's actions in the civil war brought about death and destruction but were justified because of their historical importance. Yet most murders and other crimes are not the work of world-historical individuals like Caesar, and play no significant role in pushing the progress of history along. The evil associated with such events cannot be excused by appealing to their necessary place in history.¹²

Second, Hegel's theodicy in the means/end interpretation is unable to justify nonmoral forms of evil. For Hegel reason is at work in history in the actions of humans, and it is the evil of certain human actions that

can be accounted for. But not all evil in the world is caused by humans, since there is also natural evil, the harm and suffering that results, for example, from natural disasters, disease, the infirmities of old age, etc. Traditionally the job of theodicy has been to justify or account for not only the evil that is caused by humans, but also for this natural evil. But the philosophy of history is unable to do this if it is theodicy in the way that has been suggested. Since spirit does not advance the progress of history in the events of nature, and since diseases and natural disasters are merely contingent occurrences, they cannot be justified as necessary events on the road toward freedom.

Finally, according to the means/end interpretation, theodicy can only serve effectively as a justification for evil that has occurred in history, since this justification is dependent on the fact that such evil has a necessary role in history, and so must be viewed in the context of history's complete development. But alongside the conditions of freedom that have been attained in the modern world, evil continues to be a reality: wars are still fought, people are still oppressed, etc. These evil events cannot be justified by this form of theodicy, first, because the good toward which they could potentially contribute has for Hegel already been reached, and, second, even if there was a higher goal toward which they could contribute, their necessity and hence their justification would only be apparent in retrospect. Hegel's theodicy in this interpretation has no bearing on the evil in our own lives, but is only able to give an account of evils that are already long past.

Thus, we see in these three ways that according to the means/end interpretation Hegel's philosophy of history provides only a weak reply to the problem of evil. The fact that Hegel's theodicy may be weak is not in and of itself a problem for interpreters, since this is perhaps what Hegel intended. For those who defend the means/end interpretation, this weakness of Hegelian theodicy may even be viewed as its strength, since it shows that Hegel does not try to deny or play down the full reality of the world's pain and suffering.¹³ However, I believe that the means/end interpretation on its own is insufficient. If we look closely at what Hegel writes in the 1830 manuscript about the role of philosophy of history as theodicy, Hegel appears to have a significantly stronger form of theodicy in mind. In the passage that I read at the outset of this chapter, Hegel tells us that his theodicy encompasses not only some evil but all evil. "It should enable us to comprehend all the ills of the world, including the existence of evil."¹⁴ Here Hegel clearly distinguishes human or moral evil (*Böse*) from evil in general (*Übel*) or what Nisbet translates as "ill." When he claims that theodicy should allow us to grasp "all the ills of the world," he is referring not just to

the evil that results from human action, but to all suffering whatsoever, including that brought on by acts of nature. The means/end interpretation cannot explain why Hegel thinks that the philosophy of history functions as a theodicy in this way.

Furthermore, from what Hegel tells us in his discussion of theodicy, we see that it does more than just justify evil as a means to an end. It shows, rather, that evil is itself overcome in history. Here he writes about the reconciliation that theodicy must bring about between spirit and the negative aspects of existence.

A reconciliation of the kind just described can only be achieved through a knowledge of the affirmative, an affirmative in which the negative is reduced to something subordinated and overcome. In other words, we must first of all know what the ultimate design of the world really is, and secondly, we must see that this design has been realized and that evil has not been able to maintain a position of equality beside it.¹⁵

From this passage we see that there is some sense for Hegel in which the good wins out against evil or in which the problems associated with evil and suffering are resolved for us. Once again, the means/end interpretation of Hegel's theodicy is unable to account for why Hegel might be saying this. The means/end interpretation shows that certain evil occurrences in history are necessary, but, on its own at least, it does not explain how evil is overcome. History could lead necessarily to the advent of freedom without having any effect on the place of evil in the world or our relationship to it.

Freedom as the Overcoming of Evil

The passages that I have just presented give us good reason to look more closely at how Hegel's philosophy of history is theodicy. The starting point for such a reconsideration is to be found in the manuscript passages that I have already considered above. Hegel's initial explanation of theodicy is that it ought to allow us to grasp the evil (*Übel*) of the world in general and that it ought to allow thinking spirit to be reconciled with the negative. Elaborating on this reconciliation, Hegel says a little farther that it requires the perception (*Recentness*) of an affirmative in which the negative (i.e., evil) is subordinated and overcome. When Hegel speaks of an affirmative in which evil is transcended, what is he referring to? The answer is given in what follows, where he goes on to

spell out three points through which this perception of the affirmative is achieved. First, this perception requires that we be conscious of what the final purpose of the world is. Although Hegel does not say so explicitly here, we have seen that this final purpose is freedom. Second, it demands consciousness that this purpose, or freedom, is actualized in the world. Third, this perception involves a recognition that evil does not count alongside this purpose. In other words, in freedom evil is overcome; it no longer has force. Thus, the affirmative in which evil is transcended is freedom itself.¹⁶ Hegel is suggesting that for the individual freedom is itself a type of solution to the problem posed by evil, that with the advent of freedom evil is in some way overcome. The philosophy of history is theodicy because it shows that history progresses necessarily toward freedom in which evil is transcended, and that this state of freedom has been realized in modern European culture.

The claim that freedom allows us to transcend evil is one that does not fit well either with ordinary conceptions of freedom or with conceptions of freedom normally attributed to Hegel. Although scholars agree strongly that the concept of freedom is of central importance in Hegel's thinking, there is still a lot of debate over what this freedom involves. Some stress that freedom is ultimately the capacity to make decisions that are truly independent or self-determined.¹⁷ This means that our decisions are not merely determined by our natural impulses or desires, but are rationally justified by us insofar as they are actions that we are able to support with good reasons. For others, Hegelian freedom is ultimately self-actualization,¹⁸ and in yet other cases the emphasis is put on freedom as reconciliation with the other.¹⁹ None of these views gives us an obvious explanation of why Hegel thinks that freedom allows us to overcome evil. If interpreted in any of these ways, freedom is undoubtedly a good. Moreover, being a member of a society in which freedom is promoted might arguably shield someone from evil more than being a member of another type of society would. But it is not apparent on any of these readings why freedom would allow us to overcome evil in the way that Hegel is suggesting. Whether freedom means having the capacity to make independent decisions or being fully self-actualized or being at home in the world, it does not, in and of itself, spare a person from evil and does not offer any obvious way of dealing with evil. Further explanation is required.

Hegel has claimed that the advent of freedom involves a transcending of evil, and I believe that there is other textual evidence to suggest at least that Hegel does see freedom as a state in which evil is overcome. As I will argue, freedom for Hegel ultimately involves liberation, and this is rooted in the fact that freedom not only allows us to supersede

our particular existence but even requires that we do so. In the 1830 manuscript Hegel closely associates freedom with the capacity to think or to act as a universal, and, in turn, with the ability to renounce one's particular or natural self.

Since man alone—as distinct from the animals—is a thinking being, he alone possesses freedom, and he possesses it solely by virtue of his ability to think. Consciousness of freedom consists in the fact that the individual comprehends himself as a person, i.e. that he sees himself in his distinct existence as inherently universal, *as capable of abstraction from and renunciation of everything particular*, and therefore as inherently infinite.²⁰

In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel's point is even stronger: freedom involves not only the capacity to renounce one's particular natural existence, but requires that the individual ultimately carry out this renunciation. In a discussion of the cultus, he writes:

This highest rupture is what generates the field of true freedom. Here the view is that human beings are no longer naturally good; rather the natural state, the immediate life of the heart, is what must be renounced, since it is the moment of immediate naturalness that does not leave spirit free. . . . Now there is the requirement that the heart should break, i.e., that the immediate will, the natural self-consciousness, should be given up.²¹

To take another example, Hegel writes the following in his discussion of the third moment of the consummate religion: “[T]he knowledge of it belongs to finite spirit so that finite spirit has its freedom in this knowledge, and is itself the process of casting off its particular individuality and of liberating itself in this content.”²²

Commentators on Hegel's theory of freedom are well aware that for Hegel freedom involves the capacity to rise above our natural inclinations, and so I think that most would be comfortable with Hegel's claim from the manuscript passage at least. It makes sense for Hegel to hold this position, since the ability to control one's natural side, one's desires and inclinations, is a necessary condition for any form of rational choice. To be free is to be rationally self-determined, and to be rationally self-determined is to act as reason tells us to act. Different interpreters understand rational self-determination for Hegel differently. For some, it

is consistent with being motivated by one's particular desires, while for others it is not.²³ However, all would accept that for Hegel free actions cannot be ones that are immediately determined by our inclinations. For Hegel we need the ability to override or stand above these desires if we are to act as a free and rational agent should, since the dictates of reason often conflict with these desires.

That rational self-determination requires in this way the ability to resist desires and inclinations is certainly true. I am suggesting that for Hegel this ability of the thinking agent to overcome or rise above her particularity plays another important role in freedom: by being able to renounce her particularity or the natural side of herself, the agent is able to overcome her suffering, or, to put it positively, she is in a position to reconcile herself and her expectations with the world. Before we consider the textual evidence, we should first try to clarify what Hegel means by this expression "overcoming evil." There are at least a couple of things that he could mean by this. First, "overcoming evil" can be interpreted as the *elimination* of pain and suffering. When an agent overcomes pain in this sense, the pain no longer exists for the agent as pain. Here suffering is fully transcended. Second, "overcoming evil" can be interpreted as the *enduring* of pain and suffering. Unlike the first interpretation, here the agent continues to feel pain or to suffer, but the agent is able to bear the suffering. Here the agent has accepted the pain or is reconciled with it, and it no longer poses a problem.

Although there is some evidence to suggest that Hegel has in mind the first interpretation of "overcoming evil,"²⁴ the preponderance of evidence indicates that for Hegel the overcoming of evil in freedom is not a complete elimination of suffering but an acceptance of suffering. At the outset of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, where Hegel writes about spirit's essential nature, he associates freedom with the ability not to escape pain but to endure it. There he tells us that free spirit is able to "abstract from all that is external and even from its own externality, its determinate being [*Dasein*]."²⁵ He then goes on to explain "[spirit] can bear the infinite *pain* of the negation of its individual immediacy i.e. maintain itself affirmatively in this negativity and have identity as a being-for-self."²⁶ Thus, for Hegel the free individual has the capacity to endure pain and suffering. She may not be able to make the suffering go away completely, but Hegel indicates that she is able to deal with it.

Hegel may be starting to sound a lot like a Stoic, but it is important to note that a Stoic, at least in the narrow sense, Hegel is not. With the formal or abstract freedom of the Stoic, the agent identifies entirely with herself as a thinking being capable of abstraction—her undifferentiated, immediate universal nature—and in so doing gives

up her particularity or her desires. She no longer sees these desires as a part of herself, and it is this renunciation of her desires that allows her to overcome suffering. That Hegel distances himself from the Stoic model is perhaps clearest from the critique of Catholic monasticism and asceticism that Hegel raises at numerous points throughout the Berlin writings. Hegel rejects Catholic celibacy in favor of family life, vows of poverty in favor of diligent and honest acquisition of earthly goods, and blind obedience to authority in favor of rational freedom.²⁷ Hegel does not advocate a life of abstract freedom, one in which a person seeks to liberate himself by attempting to deny or eliminate desire altogether. As we all know, true freedom for Hegel is concrete freedom, and the concretely free individual is one that expresses himself as a particular and that has particular wants. The person who is concretely free may be in a position to renounce his particular desires, but he does not actually do so. Rather, the satisfaction of particular desire has an important role to play in the rational way of life.²⁸

Thus, if the person that is concretely free is able to overcome suffering, she does so in a different way than the person who is abstractly free. Hegel explains this difference as follows: "In abstract freedom I am able to sublimate all content, all determinateness in me; in concrete freedom I annihilate the other in my determinateness—restriction, negation—[and] am only at home with myself [*bei mir*]."²⁹ Insofar as concrete freedom involves being at home with oneself in suffering, Hegel is suggesting here that one is reconciled with this suffering. In order to show how concrete spirit is able to endure suffering, Hegel compares how negation affects both the natural and the spiritual. When certain properties of a natural object undergo negation, the object is changed or transformed completely; it is no longer what it was. To take Hegel's example, if gold no longer had its specific weight, it would no longer be gold.³⁰ Spirit, however, is able to undergo the negation of its particularity without being fundamentally altered. It "is able to maintain itself in contradiction and consequently in pain, to survive wickedness [*Böse*] as well as evil [*Übel*]."³¹ The individual is able to endure suffering as a concrete universal, because as spirit she is able to sublimate negation and so remains with herself in this other. Pain and suffering are themselves determinations of spirit, and so spirit can find itself at home with them and be free. Pain ultimately does not, or need not, disturb the identity of spirit with itself. As Hegel states, "Since we also have the consciousness of our freedom, the harmony of our souls and our peace of mind will not be destroyed by the misfortunes that befall us."³²

Thus, in concrete freedom we overcome evil not by eradicating suffering but by learning to live with it or by being reconciled with it.

Hegel is saying quite simply that the free individual can recognize pain as just another one of its particular determinations, one that the mind is able to distance itself from, or one that is ideal just like any other determination and so can be taken in stride. As with abstract freedom, the agent that is concretely free is ultimately able to achieve a form of liberation from suffering. However, she does so not by stamping out all desire and inclination, but by accepting the negation of particular desires whenever this occurs.

This acceptance of suffering need not be viewed merely as a state of resignation. Not only does the free individual reduce the effect of suffering by being able to let go of what she cannot have, but she also benefits from the good that freedom itself brings, a good that works to offset the negative aspects of suffering.³³ This good is the feeling of blessedness that results from identifying with the universal and from acting in accordance with one's own rational nature. Nor should the overcoming of evil be viewed as a capacity that can be immediately exercised. The overcoming of evil that is present in freedom needs to be understood as mediated by ethical life. Hegel is not proposing that we are automatically able to endure any pain simply because we decide to accept it. Rather, this aspect of freedom is one made gradually possible by habit (*Gewohnheit*), and, more specifically, by participation in ethical life.³⁴ A detailed discussion of how ethical life shapes this capacity for freedom cannot be undertaken here, but I can give a brief outline of what I think this explanation would be like. An ethical life for Hegel is a modern life. It involves possessing property, marrying and raising a family, having a career, acting morally, being a member of the state, etc. Far from being ascetic, ethical life gives the individual a lot of room in which she can, indeed ought to, pursue her own particular desires. However, for Hegel ethical life is governed first and foremost by duty. It is a life in which all of a person's actions or activities are justified by, or are at least consistent with, the achievement of the highest good, namely freedom. The individual's particular subjective existence—her own personal subjective identity with all her likes and dislikes, needs, talents, experiences, expectations, etc.—is a necessary moment of who she is as a free individual, and it needs to be developed and nurtured. But as a moment, it is also sublated or ideal; it can be affected or changed without affecting her universal nature. By living a life of duty, a life in which she ultimately subordinates her particular interests to the imperatives of her universal, rational side, the agent's capacity to act and view herself as the universal is strengthened gradually, and with it her ability to rise above or to bear pain is also strengthened. To put it in Hegel's terms, she develops the capacity to eliminate the otherness of the negative and

to be at home with herself in it. It is in this way that the ethical life allows one to be reconciled slowly with life's adversity.

The Philosophy of History as Theodicy

Let us return to the main topic of this chapter, namely, Hegel's claim that the philosophy of history is theodicy. I have argued that the means/end view does not account for all the claims that Hegel makes about his theodicy, and I have explored Hegel's claim that theodicy involves recognizing that evil is overcome in freedom. It should be noted that even if evil for Hegel is overcome in freedom, this fact does little to strengthen Hegel's response to the problem of evil. Freedom as overcoming of evil is perhaps good news for those who are free or part of a free society: it can contribute to the individual's own struggle with suffering because it suggests that in freedom the reality or full force of evil can be mitigated. This also can contribute to addressing the problem of evil in a small way, since it shows for one group of people in history that evil need not be the problem that it initially appears to be. However, this does nothing to justify the unmitigated suffering of those in both the past and present who are not free. It may be the case that in truth evil is ideal, but this of little comfort or use to those who cannot benefit from this truth. If we recognize this, then we see that we are not much farther ahead than the means/end interpretation in our justification of evil.

We make better sense of Hegel's claim that the philosophy of history is theodicy if we abandon the view that it is a theodicy as a response to the problem of evil. The *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* do demonstrate that certain evil events in history are necessary, but the primary task of Hegel's theodicy is not to try to provide a rational justification for the world's suffering. A strong case can be made for the fact that Hegel often employs his religious terminology in unconventional ways. I have in mind here terms such as *immortality*, *eternity*, *creation*, *proof* as in the proofs for God's existence, *the mystical*, and, perhaps most importantly but also most controversially, the term *God* itself. If Hegel is employing such terms in unusual ways, there is no reason to assume that his use of the term *theodicy* could not also be unusual. In considering the few other instances where Hegel speaks of theodicy in his Berlin writings, we see that philosophy is theodicy for Hegel in a more general sense, insofar as it simply demonstrates to the philosophical observer that spirit is present in the world, or demonstrates that the world or history is governed by reason.³⁵ If we assume that

this is what Hegel means by "theodicy," then theodicy need not be first and foremost an explanation of why there is evil in the world. In this interpretation of theodicy, the demonstration that God is at work in the world allows the observer to comprehend evil or to be reconciled with the negative, not because it shows that all of this evil had to be or because it justifies all the suffering in history in the way that full theodicy ordinarily demands, but because it shows the individual that evil is ultimately overcome by free spirit. On this reading, theodicy allows the individual to be reconciled with the negative insofar as it demonstrates that evil by its very nature is ultimately ideal.

At the very least, the view that freedom for Hegel involves an overcoming of evil gives the philosophy of history a more optimistic feel from Hegel's point of view than it might otherwise have. It shows more than the fact that history develops in a necessary way toward its final purpose, the goal of freedom. Freedom is not a good that simply exists for the individual alongside the evil that she continues to suffer. Freedom itself is a form of response to evil. It is a state in which one has the knowledge and social context necessary to live a life in which suffering can be handled. In the free individual's own life at least, good wins out against evil, not because evil is completely eliminated but because it is possible for her in her freedom to accept and be reconciled with it.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Ardis Collins, David Duquette, George di Giovanni, William Maker, Bryan Smyth, Ken Westphal, and anonymous reviewers for valuable feedback on earlier versions of this chapter.

2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 42 (hereafter *LPW*).

3. *Ibid.*, 42–43.

4. *Ibid.*, 42. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte: Berlin 1822/23*, Vol. 12, ed. Karl Heinz Ilting, Karl Brehmer, and Hoo Nam Seelmann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996), 23 (hereafter *VPW*).

5. See, for example, Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth, and History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 24–25; Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 39–48; George Dennis O'Brien, *Hegel on Reason and History: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 53–57; Terry Pinkard, "Hegel on History, Self-Determination, and the Absolute," in *History and the Idea of Progress*, ed. Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 53–54.

6. I have borrowed this analogy from Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth, and History*, 24.

7. LPW, 27. As he indicates explicitly in his discussion of providence, Hegel maintains that religious and philosophical language provide two parallel ways of making the same claim about history. "I could have refrained from mentioning that our principle (i.e. that reason governs the world and always has done so) has a religious equivalent in the doctrine of a ruling providence" LPW, 37.

8. VPW, 21, 22.

9. Ibid., 24.

10. McCarney's account of Hegel's philosophy of history as theodicy is a version of the means/end view, as is Beiser's. See McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 206–207; Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 272.

11. LPW, 76.

12. In his discussion of Hegel's theodicy in the philosophy of history, Beiser claims that *all* evil events in history are taken to be necessary and are therefore justified. "In Hegel's fundamentally optimistic account, nothing is lost or done in vain in the realm of history. All struggles in the past are preserved as necessary moments toward the self-awareness of freedom." Beiser, *Hegel*, 273. If Beiser's view were indeed true, it would lead to consequences that pose serious problems for Hegel's theory. For if all acts of evil are a necessary part of historical progress, then all who commit evil are world-historical individuals, and their evil actions are sanctioned by a standard that is higher than the ethical. McCarney shares my view of the matter, claiming that some evil deeds are committed by individuals who have no world-historical significance. See McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 116.

13. For example, Joseph McCarney claims that Hegel's theodicy "should, perhaps, be seen not so much as an attempt at a formal solution of the problem of evil but rather as a magisterial sidestepping of it." McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 201. It is one that leaves us with a bleak picture of world history, Ibid., 205. Hegel takes the reality of evil in the world seriously and acknowledges its true sadness, Ibid., 199–200.

14. LPW, 42.

15. Ibid., 43; translation modified.

16. Elsewhere, Hegel speaks explicitly of freedom as an affirmative in which the negative is subordinated. "Spirit's negation is in spirit subordinated to its affirmation, the unity with itself. This is the determination of freedom in general." *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes: Berlin 1827/1828*, Vol. 13, ed. Franz Hespe and Burkhard Tuschling (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994), 14 (hereafter VPG).

17. See, for example, Robert Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 109. Alan Patten in *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11, identifies his interpretation as a self-actualization reading, but in fact his interpretation of what freedom involves is similar to Pippin's. In Patten's reading, subjective freedom, the capacity for autonomous decision making, is an essential part of

full freedom, and its promotion for Patten is what ultimately justifies the norms of ethical life.

18. See Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36.

19. McCarney takes reconciliation and the overcoming of alienation as central to Hegel's concept of freedom. See McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 77–79. In the philosophy of world history, this reconciliation is understood as finding oneself at home in one's political setting, *Ibid.*, 80. For Will Dudley, complete freedom involves various forms of reconciliation. See Will Dudley, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and Philosophy: Thinking Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 111. These forms of reconciliation include being at home in one's social and political situation, as well as having a theoretical understanding of the fact that the natural world is not an other. Dudley's account of freedom as reconciliation and as liberation is closest in spirit to my own. However, I have found no evidence that Dudley interprets Hegel's concept of freedom as the capacity to endure suffering.

20. *LPW*, 144; my italics.

21. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols., trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984–87), 1:362 (hereafter *LPR1-3*).

22. *Ibid.*, 223. Hegel also associates freedom with the loss of particularity in the following passages: *LPR-1*, 342–43; *LPR-2*, 623, 634; *VPW*, 501, 519. The theme of overcoming of particularity is one that thoroughly pervades Hegel's work in the Berlin period. It is a central part not only of Hegel's philosophy of religion, but plays a role for Hegel in education, art, philosophy, and ethical life.

23. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 44, belongs to the former, while Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 51, and Richard Schacht, *Hegel and After: Studies in Continental Philosophy: Between Kant and Sartre* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), 76, have a more Kantian reading of Hegel's freedom.

24. For example, in the preface to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*—perhaps the most rhetorical and passionate couple of pages that the mature Hegel wrote—Hegel gives the impression that religion offers a type of liberation or escape from suffering. “Finite purposes, disgust at petty interests, the pain of this life, even if only in isolated moments that are themselves unhappy, the troubles, burdens, and cares of ‘this bank and shoal of time,’ pity and compassion—all this, like a dream image, seems to float away into the past like the soul that drinks from the waters of forgetfulness, its other, mortal, nature fading into a mere semblance, which no longer causes it anxiety and on which it is no longer dependent,” *LPR1*, 85. Moreover, in a remarkable passage from the *Science of Logic*, Hegel indicates that a person ought not to care about the state of his particular existence. Replying here to Kant's famous argument against the ontological proof for the existence of God, Hegel states that the Christian ought to be indifferent whether he does or does not possess the infamous one hundred dollars, and Hegel goes on to say that “it ought to be a matter of indifference to him whether he is or is not, that is, in finite life,” G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's*

Science of Logic, trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1993), 89. In this passage Hegel's ideal Christian is suggestive of the Stoic: he does not care about the particulars of his existence or does not cling to the satisfaction of his own desires, and so does not suffer when these desires are not met. In the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel tells us that a person is able to overcome pain or is able to be liberated from sensation through habit (*Gewohnheit*), G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, 3 vols., trans. M. J. Petry (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978), 2:§410, Remark. Hereafter PSS-3. Habit or custom makes it possible for a person to harden his body against external sensations such as heat, cold, or fatigue, and to harden the mind against unhappiness. Habit also makes it possible for a person to become indifferent with regard to whether or not his desires are satisfied. It is not entirely clear to what extent Hegel thinks we can inure ourselves through habit to pain and deprivation. However, all of this evidence indicates that for Hegel it is possible, at least to some degree, to be indifferent to loss and to rise above pain.

25. PSS-1, §382.

26. In his discussion of stoicism in *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Teile 1–4*, Vols. 6–10, ed. Pierre Garniron and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986–1996), 3:114, hereafter VGP-4, Hegel confirms his view that the free individual is able to resist pain, and he claims that this understanding of freedom is what is great in Stoic philosophy.

27. G. W. F. Hegel, *Berliner Schriften: 1818–1831*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956), 45–51. One also finds a very similar critique of Catholic holiness in LPR-1, 473; LPR-3, 341–42, 455–56.

28. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), §154; §261, Remark.

29. VPG, 14.

30. PSS-1, §382, Addition.

31. Ibid.

32. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), §147, Addition (hereafter EL).

33. This point was suggested to me by Ken Westphal.

34. PSS-2, §410.

35. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 457; G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, Werke vol. 20, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 455; VGP-4, 6. For other references to theodicy, see LPR-1, 147; EL, §147, Addition.

Hegel's Philosophy of History and Kabbalist Eschatology

Glenn Magee

Introduction

Hegel's philosophy of history makes three striking claims, which have been both tremendously influential and tremendously controversial. First, Hegel claims that history has a knowable pattern or order that allows us to speak not only of meaning in history, but also of history's end point. Second, this end point is understood by Hegel to occur *within time*. Third, Hegel asserts that at the end of history, amongst other things, the Absolute Idea or God becomes "objectified" in human institutions.

These claims are famous in part because they are regarded as highly original. They are also notorious, because they were offered and accepted as part of an optimistic, humanistic, and (broadly speaking) Enlightenment worldview that now seems questionable to many of us living in the "postmodern age." Thus, it is rather surprising to discover that not only are these theses not wholly original, but that they are to be found in the "irrationalist" tradition of Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah. In this chapter I shall argue that the basic tenets of Hegel's philosophy of history—as well as much else in his thought—are to be found in the Christian adaptation of Kabbalism handed down through what has come to be known as Swabian "speculative pietism."

Further, I do not intend simply to show that there are striking parallels between the doctrines of Swabian speculative pietism and those of Hegel. I will also lay out a case that there was a highly probable, though mostly indirect, influence of this tradition on him. I shall begin with an overall description of the doctrines of the Kabbalah, and then offer a brief history of how these doctrines were adapted by Christians,

with special attention to how they influenced authors writing in Hegel's native Württemberg. In the works of two highly influential Swabian theologians, J. A. Bengel and F. C. Oetinger, Kabbalistic ideas coalesce with those of the Christian apocalyptic thinker Joachim of Fiore to form an unusual eschatology. I shall argue that this eschatology was an influence on both Schelling and Hegel.

The Jewish Kabbalah

"Kabbalah" can be translated as "received," or "tradition." Some scholars argue that Kabbalism, as a distinct form of Jewish mysticism, begins in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries in Spain. Others maintain that it is far older. There are many schools of thought within Kabbalism, but it is possible to discern certain fundamental ideas which continually crop up.

In the Kabbalah, God is conceived initially as *Ein-Sof*, or infinite; an utterly transcendent and unknowable being. However, within this being is a will to self-manifestation. Indeed, many Kabbalists held that God as unmanifest is incomplete or inchoate. Gershom Scholem writes that, "The essence of the Kabbalistic idea of God . . . lies in its resolutely dynamic conception of the Godhead."¹ God's self-development unfolds, according to the Kabbalists, through a series of emanations that take place at first *within* God, then lead to God's expression in the form of nature.

The first stage of God's self-development or self-manifestation is conceived by many Kabbalists as a kind of primal indeterminacy, which is both being and nothing. As one thirteenth-century Kabbalist writes, "Nothingness is being, and being is nothingness."² This indeterminacy is called *Ayin*. Scholem claims that *Ayin* transcends the subject-object distinction, but that its telos is to become a true subject.³ Speaking figuratively, the Kabbalists say that "God willed to see God," to achieve perfect self-relation.⁴ Scholem writes that, "the *Zohar* [one of the most important Kabbalist works] identifies the highest development of God's personality with precisely that stage of His unfolding which is nearest to human experience, indeed which is immanent and mysteriously present in every one of us."⁵

From out of *Ayin* emerge ten emanations or *Sephiroth*. The term *Sephiroth*, which means "numbers," first appears in the *Sefer Yezirah* (or *Book of Creation*), the earliest known Kabbalistic text. The system of *Sephiroth*, usually depicted in a diagram known as the "Tree of Life," is essentially an articulation of the aspects or moments of the divine nature or the divine mind. Ernst Benz writes that the *Sephiroth* "are

different levels on the way to the self-mirroring and self-manifestation of the transcendent divine Being.”⁶ But the *Sephiroth* perform a number of functions in the Kabbalah. In addition to being an articulation of the aspects of God, they are simultaneously a categorial ontology, a philosophy of nature, and a psychology: in other words the *Sephiroth* are the ten most fundamental categories in terms of which we can make being-as-such, nature, and human psychology intelligible. Scholem writes that “this tree of God [the Tree of Life] is also, as it were, the skeleton of the universe; it grows throughout the whole of creation and spreads its branches through all its ramifications. All mundane and created things exist only because something of the power of the *Sephiroth* lives and acts in them.”⁷

As to the *Sephiroth* themselves, they are always presented in a hierarchical order that almost never varies in the works of the Kabbalists. And this hierarchy, as Scholem and others have pointed out, is dialectical, containing a number of pairs of opposing or antagonistic *Sephiroth* reconciled, in each case, by a third. Indeed, in one of his works Scholem states that “we find [in the Kabbalah] a mode of contemplative thought that can be called ‘dialectic’ in the strictest sense of the term as used by Hegel.”⁸ Despite their hierarchical structure, each *Sephirah* is considered equally close to its source in *Ein-Sof* or *Ayin*. Scholem says that in the *Sefer Yezirah*, “it is emphasized that the ten *Sephiroth* constitute a closed unit, for ‘their end is in their beginning and their beginning in their end’ and they revolve in each other; i.e., these ten basic principles constitute a unity.”⁹ Scholem notes further that “[f]rom the 13th century onward we find the idea that each *Sephirah* comprises all others successively in an infinite reflection of the *Sephiroth* within themselves.”¹⁰

A description of each of the ten *Sephiroth* and its symbolism would require an article (or, more properly, a book) in itself, and so I will confine myself to a discussion of *Malkhut*, the tenth and final *Sephirah*, because *Malkhut* is conceived as “containing” each of the preceding *Sephiroth*, which culminate in it.¹¹ *Malkhut* represents the divine presence *in the world*. In a sense, it is the transition point, or the portal between the purely eidetic realm of the *Sephiroth*, and the world of space-time. Sometimes *Malkhut* is referred to as *Shekhinah* or “divine presence.” But what kind of presence is it? Earlier I stated that though *Ein-Sof*, or God in himself, is beyond the subject-object distinction, the Kabbalists understand God’s end as to develop into a true subject. Many Kabbalists identify the subjectivity of God with *Malkhut* or *Shekhinah*. God’s presence in the world is simultaneously God fully developed as a subject, or a self-conscious being. But, to use a carefully chosen word, what does this mean *concretely*?

Consider the following lines from Joseph Gikatilla (thirteenth century):

[In the days of the Patriarchs] the *Shekhinah* was *in suspenso* [literally, “hanging in the air”], and found no resting place for its feet on earth, as in the beginning of Creation. But then came Moses, of blessed memory, and all of Israel together with him built the Tabernacle and the vessels, and repaired the broken channels, and put the ranks in order, and repaired the ponds, and drew live water into them from the House of Water Drawing, and then brought the *Shekhinah* back to its dwelling among the lower ones—into the Tent, but not upon the ground as in the beginning of Creation. And the hint of this is: “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” [Exod. 25:8]. We find that the *Shekhinah* was like a guest, moving from place to place, and of this it is said “and I shall dwell among them” and not “I shall dwell below” but “among them”—i.e., like a lodger. Until David and Solomon came, and placed the *Shekhinah* on solid ground in the Temple of Jerusalem.¹²

This and other passages seem to be saying that the living presence of God, *Shekhinah*, truly came to be only in the Temple of Jerusalem, the religious center of the Israelites.

A well-known Kabbalistic epigram states: “Israel forms the limbs of the *Shekhinah*.”¹³ The Jewish Gnostics held to a doctrine of the “exile of the *Shekhinah*,” which maintained that God’s presence in the world is like a “divine spark” which must be ignited in order that the world be filled with divine presence. This is the task of the *knes-set Yisrael*, which came in the works of the Kabbalists to be identified with *Shekhinah*.¹⁴ Christian Kabbalists, whom I shall treat in the next section, accordingly identified *Shekhinah* with the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit.

In contrast to conventional or orthodox Christianity, however, Jewish Kabbalism views redemption as something that will take place in time and within the world. As Scholem expresses it, “[R]edemption is expressed as the end of the ‘exile of the *Shekhinah*,’ the restoration of the Divine unity throughout all areas of existence.”¹⁵ And this is the basic Kabbalist eschatology. God develops and unfolds through creation and history, but creation (and thus God) must be completed or perfected by the faithful. Daniel Matt writes, “God is not static being, but dynamic becoming. Without human participation, God remains

incomplete, unrealized. It is up to us to actualize the divine potential in the world. God needs us.”¹⁶

Eschatology became a major Kabbalist preoccupation with the advent of the so-called new Kabbalah of Isaac Luria (1534–1572). Luria's teachings were enormously influential well beyond the confines of Judaism. (Most of what can be called “Kabbalistic” in the thought of Jacob Boehme, for example, is Lurianic.) Luria reasons that if God is truly without limit there would be no room for creation. Yet, manifestly, creation does exist. The solution to this problem is for God, the Infinite, to *contain* the finite. According to Luria's cosmogony—which is expressed almost entirely in mythic form—God created the world by making a space within himself and then injecting the divine light into that space. The light differentiated itself into the ten *Sephiroth*, which streamed into ten “vessels,” but the vessels proved incapable of holding it and shattered. It is the broken shards of these vessels that constitute the inherently imperfect matter out of which our world is made. But the goal of this imperfect world is to be made whole; to be perfected and raised back up to the divine light. This would complete the cosmic process begun literally within God, by transforming the finite within the infinite into a faithful image of the infinite. This idea is called by Luria *Tikkun* (a term that is not original with him, though his use of it is highly original). *Tikkun* is the cosmic restoration, and it is effected by human beings.

Scholem writes that Luria believed that “[t]he process in which God conceives, brings forth and develops Himself does not reach its final conclusion in God. Certain parts of the process of restitution are allotted to man.”¹⁷ The supreme task of men on earth is to perfect themselves, to realize the nature of the divine Adam in the earthly Adam and thereby to raise the fallen, created world up to its initial state of being in the light emanated by God. The means to accomplish this is obedience to the commandments of the Torah, which are conceived by Luria as, in effect, an instruction manual for bringing about God's presence in the world.¹⁸ Scholem writes that, “By fulfilling the commandments of the Torah, man restores his own spiritual structure; he carves it out of himself, as it were. And since every part corresponds to a commandment, the solution of the task demands the complete fulfillment of all the 613 commandments.”¹⁹ If the *Tikkun* is to come to pass it is crucial that the Law must be strictly observed. Summing up Luria's position, Scholem states that “it is man who adds the final touch to the divine countenance; it is he who completes the enthronement of God, the King and the mystical creator of all things, in His own Kingdom of Heaven; it is he who perfects the Maker of all things!”²⁰

Incidentally, it is Luria's Kabbalah and only Luria's that Hegel discusses under the section "Kabbalistische Philosophie" in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

Throughout the preceding account I have not drawn explicit parallels between the Kabbalah and Hegel's philosophy. I have instead counted upon readers to make such comparisons, as in many places they are quite obvious. However, an objection might be raised at this point. I have relied throughout chiefly upon the interpretation of the Kabbalah advanced by Gershom Scholem. (I have frequently quoted Scholem rather than primary Kabbalistic texts simply because the writings of the Kabbalists, even in brief quotation, require extensive exegesis in order for their meaning to become at all approachable.) But Scholem himself was a product of the German university system, and studied Hegel and the Idealists closely. Couldn't his own understanding of Kabbalism have been colored by his acquaintance with Hegel, and aren't I therefore "stacking the deck" in inviting a comparison between Scholem's Kabbalah and Hegel's philosophy? There is, in fact, no way to adequately answer such an objection in a short article. I can only invite those interested in the matter to study the original Kabbalist texts and make up their own minds whether there are genuine parallels between the Kabbalah and Hegel.²¹ However, my argument does not rest entirely on a simple comparison between Kabbalist and Hegelian doctrine, but also on evidence of direct and indirect influence. I believe, in fact, that it is possible to situate Hegel's philosophy in the historical lineage of "Christian Kabbalism."

The Christian Kabbalah

Christians initially used Kabbalist ideas to attempt to prove the divinity of Christ, and to unlock the secret meaning of the Trinity. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) is generally recognized as the founder of Christian Kabbalism. Pico had a number of Hebrew texts translated into Latin, and in 1486 went to Rome with nine hundred "theses" offered for public debate. One of them stated that "no science can better convince us of the divinity of Jesus Christ than magic and the Kabbalah." The swift condemnation of the Church did not deter others from following in Pico's path. In Germany, Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), who knew Pico, published two Christian Kabbalist works, *De Verbo Mirifico* in 1494, and *De Arte Cabalistica* in 1517. It was largely through Reuchlin's work that the Christian appropriation of the Kabbalah became respectable in

European intellectual circles. Germany, in fact, became one of the major centers of Christian Kabbalist speculation.

Perhaps the most significant of the Christian Kabbalists in Germany was Jacob Boehme, a shoemaker from Lusatia who had a mystical vision in 1600 and subsequently wrote his first work, *Aurora*, in 1612. Like his other writings, it bears the unmistakable influence of the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria—though it remains a mystery what Boehme's sources could have been. The importance of Boehme for the history of the Christian Kabbalah is that he translated Kabbalist language and ideas into a wholly new vocabulary. The *Sephiroth*, for example, became the “seven source spirits,” and Boehme replaced their majestic Hebrew names with homey designations like Sour, Sweet, Bitter, Heat, Love, etc. Indeed, because he wrote only in German, and invented a wholly new philosophical (or theosophical) vocabulary, Hegel declared him to be the “first German philosopher.” As is well known, Hegel devotes considerable attention to Boehme in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. However, the question of Boehme's influence on Hegel is a controversial one. I believe, and have argued elsewhere, that although Hegel ultimately distances himself from Boehme, the influence was positive and decisive.²² In fact, one might attempt to prove Kabbalist influence on Hegel simply by dealing with Boehme. For the purposes of the present chapter, I have chosen instead to argue for another influence entirely.

Beginning in the seventeenth century in Germany, Christian Kabbalist ideas (from a variety of sources) became influential in pietist circles—and this was especially the case in Hegel's native Württemberg. Indeed, the Swabian tradition of Christian Kabbalism actually begins with Reuchlin, who was native to the region.

The Duchy of Württemberg was notorious for harboring strange forms of mysticism, religious enthusiasm, and reactionary antimodernism. This was especially the case after it turned Protestant in 1534, and remained so until well into the nineteenth century. David Walsh writes that in the modern era: “The influence of the Enlightenment, to the extent it had made itself felt in Württemberg, was integrated with a theosophic philosophy of nature and a speculative pietism which was concerned with the progressive revelation of the divine structure of history.”²³ This tradition culminates with Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), the most important figure in the history of Württemberg pietism after Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752).

Bengel and his followers—who called themselves “The Free” (*Die Freien*)—proclaimed the “final age” of man in which God would be actualized in the world and history would come to an end. Bengel's

theory of history was influenced by Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202), a Benedictine monk who held that history exhibited a definite pattern and would come to an end when all the different historical possibilities have played themselves out. The *eidos* of history, for Joachim, is the Christian Trinity. Joachim speaks of the “Age of the Father,” “Age of the Son,” and “Age of the Holy Spirit.” Each age represents an advance in the freedom and spiritual attainment of humankind. In the final stage of history all that matters is the piety and contemplativeness of the individual, not the sacraments of the organized Church, which Joachim believed would wither away.²⁴

As to Oetinger, he encountered Boehme’s writings while at the Tübingen seminary, where Schelling and Hegel would study several decades later. In addition to Boehme, there were Jewish Kabbalistic influences on Oetinger. He is known to have visited a circle of Jewish Kabbalists at Frankfurt am Main, who introduced him to Knorr von Rosenroth’s *Kabbala Denudata*, as well as to Lurianic works.²⁵ Oetinger’s firsthand knowledge of Kabbalistic texts allowed him to greatly expand upon Boehme’s ideas. His insight into Kabbalism is reflected in one of his most important works, *Öffentliches Denckmal der Lehrtafel* (1763). This work was a commentary on a Kabbalistic triptych painting hanging in a church at Bad Teinach in the Black Forest (where it hangs to this day). The painting had been commissioned in 1652 by Princess Antonia of Württemberg, who was a follower of a Christian Kabbalist pastor.

Boehme’s claim that spirit cannot truly exist without embodiment is crucial for Oetinger’s thought. Oetinger writes: “Embodiment is the end of God’s work” (*Leiblichkeit ist das Ende der Werke Gottes*).²⁶ Oetinger refers to God as *Geist*, and holds that *Geist* comes to more and more adequate expression through corporeality—what he calls *Geistlichkeit*. All of nature and history exhibits the process of God’s progressive embodiment, which is simultaneously the process by which God achieves self-consciousness. Oetinger holds that “God is an eternal desire for self-revelation” (*eine ewige Begierde sich zu offenbaren*).²⁷ He writes, “The ancients [*die Alten*] saw God as an eternal process in which he emerges from himself and returns to himself; this is the true conception of God and of his Glory; it is the true conception of his infinite life and power which issues in the Blessed Trinity.”²⁸

There is quite a bit that can be described as Lurianic in Oetinger’s theology. His developmental conception of God, who begins in an inchoate form, is strikingly Lurianic, as is his belief that God is actualized in the world through the activity of human beings. Indeed, Benz notes that Oetinger gave Christian Kabbalah a strong eschatological twist:

Oetinger was deeply convinced that the world was in fact rushing to its end at a tremendous pace, that the Return of Christ would take place in the year 1834, and that the "Golden Age" would arrive in a few decades. Because of the proximity of the end, he felt obliged to urge the princes and the government of his time to prepare for the Golden Age that was drawing near by putting into effect a courageous reform of rights and the social order, and so contribute to the speedy end of the world and its crossing over to the Golden Age.²⁹

Having offered a sketch of Christian Kabbalism, especially in its Swabian form, I turn now to the evidence for its influence on Hegel and his schoolmates.

The Influence of Swabian Speculative Pietism on Schelling and Hegel

Writing to his father on September 7, 1806, Schelling reports that Franz von Baader (at that time the preeminent interpreter of Boehme) had asked if he could obtain for him Oetinger's writings. Schelling's father—who was a follower of Bengel—owned a number of Oetinger's books. Schelling subsequently communicated Baader's request to his friend Christian Pregizer, an Oetingerite. Pregizer later claimed that when he first met Schelling in 1803 they spent most of their time together talking about Boehme and Oetinger. Schelling's great uncle Friedrich Philipp von Rieger was one of Oetinger's supporters. When Schelling was a boy he lived for a time in Nürtingen with his uncle Nathanael Friedrich Köstlin, who was known to have a close connection to the Bengel-Oetinger circle. On October 6, 1784, Schelling's father called on Philipp Matthaeus Hahn (1739–1790)—the most influential follower of Oetinger—with his wife and young Friedrich. This event is recorded in Hahn's diary, and Schelling's first publication was a poem he wrote commemorating Hahn's death. Schelling's interest in Boehme is well documented, but he is known to have told one of his Jena students that Oetinger was "clearer than Boehme."³⁰

Ernst Benz has demonstrated that Schelling borrowed material from Oetinger's works, incorporating it into both his published writings and lectures, but without attribution. Schelling also employed translations of biblical passages made by Oetinger, also without crediting him.³¹

One can discern characteristically Oetingerite ideas in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1801) when, near the end of the text, he writes, "History as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the Absolute. . . . Man, through his history, provides a continuous demonstration of God's presence, a demonstration, however, which only the whole of history can render complete."³² Schelling then follows this up with the unmistakably Joachimite claim that history will unfold the revelation of God in three stages. Of the third stage, Schelling writes, "When this period will begin, we are unable to tell. But whenever it comes into existence, God will also then exist."³³ In making such claims, Schelling is following in the footsteps of Bengel and Oetinger, and, of course, Hegel would follow in Schelling's footsteps in making similar claims in his own philosophy of history.

It is very difficult to imagine that Schelling was unaware of his debt to Oetinger. In *Die Weltalter* (1811) Schelling writes: "This is the ultimate purpose, that everything will be transformed as far as possible into a visible and bodily form. Embodiment [*Leiblichkeit*] is, according to the ancients, the end of the ways of God, who wishes to manifest himself as much in space as in time."³⁴ This is virtually a quotation from Oetinger, who writes, again, "Embodiment is the end of God's work" (*Leiblichkeit ist das Ende der Werke Gottes*).³⁵ The influence of Oetinger's Christian Kabbalism may have made it inevitable that Schelling would find Fichte's system empty. For the Schelling of *Die Weltalter*—as for Boehme and Oetinger—the Absolute must express itself in concrete form, in nature, or remain abstract and empty. For the very same reasons, Hegel's system passes beyond *Logic* to *Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Spirit*. (Incidentally, *Die Weltalter* was also the title of a well-known book by Bengel, published in 1746.)

There is also strong evidence for the influence of Oetinger on Hoelderlin, but rather than discuss it here I shall instead refer the reader to Priscilla A. Hayden-Roy's excellent study "*A Foretaste of Heaven*": *Friedrich Hoelderlin in the Context of Württemberg Pietism*.³⁶

The fact that both Schelling and Hoelderlin were familiar with Oetinger's ideas makes it exceedingly unlikely that Hegel was not. Further, the fact that Oetinger was taken seriously by both men makes it highly likely that he was, at least to some extent, taken seriously by Hegel, who for a considerable period was very much under the influence of his two precocious schoolmates.³⁷ Indeed, it would be easy enough—but perhaps a bit lazy—to simply say that in demonstrating the influence of Oetinger and Christian Kabbalah on Schelling I have ipso facto demonstrated their (indirect) influence on Hegel. However,

this will not satisfy skeptics. My case would obviously be strengthened if it could be shown that Hegel himself was aware of this influence. There is some reason to believe, in fact, that he was, and the evidence is to be found in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

As is well known, Hegel attacks Schelling in the preface to that work with the following words: "To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfillment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black—this is cognition naively reduced to vacuity."³⁸ Hegel then immediately offers us his own conception of the Absolute as "the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual."³⁹ The Absolute, he says further, must be conceived in "the whole wealth of the developed form. Only then is it conceived and expressed as an actuality."⁴⁰ Next comes the oft-quoted remark, "The true is the whole [*Das Wahre ist das Ganze*]." In fact, this line is virtually a direct quote from Oetinger.

In one of his works Oetinger writes: "The truth is a whole [*Die Wahrheit ist ein Ganzes*]; when one finally receives this total, synoptic vision of the truth, it matters not whether one begins by considering this part or that."⁴¹ Oetinger immediately follows this up with a Kabbalistic image which essentially communicates the idea that the whole is immanent in each of the *Sephiroth*, or moments of God.⁴² The whole is known through its moments, but what enables us to move from moment to moment is the immanence of the whole in each. Oetinger, incidentally, referred to the procedure of displaying the moments of the "divine system of relations" as *Phänomenologie*. In fact, Oetinger appears to have been the first author to use the term—not, as is often claimed, Johann Heinrich Lambert—employing it as early as 1736.⁴³

This passage in Oetinger was well known. Therefore, when Hegel announces in the preface to the *Phenomenology* that "Das Wahre ist das Ganze," my suggestion is that he knew that Schelling would understand the allusion. When Hegel conceived the *Phenomenology* Schelling still held to his conception of the Absolute as Indifference Point—which was essentially a Post-Kantian reappropriation of the perennial mystical doctrine of the *coincidence of opposites*. The Absolute, in other words, is something that utterly transcends the subject-object distinction (or any other distinction). It was only later that Schelling would move to the Oetingerite conception of the Absolute as striving for embodiment or concretization. And here is Hegel in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*

giving him a clue as to how to get there: the developmental conception of God to be found in the Christian Kabbalist theological tradition exemplified by Boehme and Oetinger, and which Hegel must have known Schelling to be familiar with.

After writing, "The true is the whole," Hegel states: "But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development." The Preface's hidden dialogue with Schelling culminates, therefore, in Hegel alluding to the neo-Boehmian ideas of Oetinger's Swabian pietism. As Robert Schneider points out, the theme of the truth as a whole (or *the* whole) is a perennial theme of Swabian speculative pietism. It is for this reason, Schneider argues, that the skeptical element of Kant's philosophy was almost universally rejected in Württemberg.⁴⁴ Schneider writes that, "in the [Tübingen] *Stift*, spurred on and enriched by the Enlightenment, the original spirit of the [Swabian] *Heimat* was at work, seeking the Truth only in the Whole."⁴⁵ In the Preface, Hegel is in effect reminding Schelling of his—or rather their—roots.

Schelling seems to have understood Hegel quite well. After Hegel's death, Schelling publicly accused him of stealing many of his ideas from Jacob Boehme and his followers. For instance, in his lectures of the 1830s, Schelling remarks, "Jacob Böhme says: divine freedom vomits itself into nature. Hegel says: divine freedom releases nature. What is one to think of this notion of releasing? This much is clear: the biggest compliment one can pay to this notion is to call it 'theosophical.'"⁴⁶

It might be objected that Hegel never mentions Oetinger by name in the Preface, or anywhere else. Of course, Hegel doesn't mention Schelling by name in the Preface either. Schelling also never refers to Oetinger, though, as I have argued, there is considerable evidence for Oetinger's influence on him. This is not a mystery, however. At the time, academics who cited Oetinger faced ridicule, and clergymen who were sympathetic to his ideas even sometimes lost their positions.⁴⁷ Hegel's wary treatment of Boehme provides an interesting and illuminating parallel. In the writings Hegel published early in his career, there is only one small reference to Boehme, in paragraph 391 of the 1817 *Encyclopedia*. After he had achieved fame and a secure position in Berlin, Hegel began referring to Boehme more openly. The preface to the 1827 edition of the *Encyclopedia* includes more than one mention of Boehme, as well as an admiring reference to Franz von Baader. In the 1832 revision of the Doctrine of Being section from *The Science of Logic*, Hegel also corrects a passage so as to credit Boehme as the source of two unusual terms (*Qualierung* and *Inqualierung*). In the 1812 edition, Hegel had said only that they have their origin in "a philosophy which goes deep but into a turbid depth."⁴⁸

Conclusion

My objective in this chapter has been to show that some of the more famous claims of Hegel's philosophy, including his philosophy of history, are to be found in the Kabbalist and Joachimite mystical traditions. Further, I have argued that these strains fuse in the tradition of Swabian speculative pietism, and that there is some reason to believe that this tradition was a formative influence on both Hegel and Schelling.

However, I am not claiming that Swabian pietism was the *sole* source of certain ideas in Schelling and Hegel. The question of influence is an extremely difficult one to disentangle. The most reasonable approach is to understand both thinkers as having been influenced by multiple sources—philosophical and nonphilosophical—which they saw, in many cases, as mutually supporting and confirming each other. I am merely arguing that there is a further possible source to be explored, one that has so far received little attention from scholars. Nevertheless, to argue for such influences has, I believe, extremely important implications.

Though it seems obvious that regional traditions, attitudes, and intellectual fashions must have had an influence on the Swabian Idealists, this is actually seldom considered by philosophically trained scholars, especially Americans, who feel themselves on surer ground situating their subjects exclusively in the context of the philosophical canon. This is a highly artificial way to understand a thinker's development, and highly ironic when it is applied to a thinker such as Hegel, who was so attuned to how every man is a product of his time and place. I offer this chapter, in part, as an invitation to scholars to understand Schelling and Hegel in the context of their homeland, and in doing so I am following in the footsteps of the German scholars Ernst Benz and Robert Schneider, and, more recently the American Laurence Dickey.⁴⁹

What is needed is a study of the Swabian Idealists that situates them in the context of the speculative traditions of their native land. For example, a systematic comparison of the writings of Schelling and Hegel to those of Oetinger and other Swabian mystics and theologians might yield important new discoveries. The present essay has, I believe, merely scratched the surface.

Notes

I wish to thank William Altman, Karin de Boer, Gregory R. Johnson, Allegra de Laurentiis, Philip Grier, William Maker, David Stern, and Mario Wenning for their helpful comments and constructive criticism.

1. Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Schocken, 1991), 158.
2. Quoted in Daniel C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 68.
3. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1946), 221.
4. Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi, *Kabbalah: Tradition of Hidden Knowledge* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 7.
5. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 216–17.
6. Ernst Benz, *The Christian Kabbalah*, trans. Kenneth W. Wesche (St. Paul: Grailstone Press, 2004), 66.
7. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 214–15.
8. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: New American Library, 1978), 143.
9. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 24.
10. Ibid., 113.
11. I offer a much longer account of the *Sephiroth* and, indeed, of the Kabbalah itself in *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
12. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 178.
13. Ibid., 175.
14. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 31.
15. Ibid., 335. It should be pointed out, as with everything in the Kabbalah, that this position was held by many, but not all Kabbalists. There is seldom universal agreement about anything among Kabbalists.
16. Matt, 1–2.
17. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 273.
18. See *ibid.*, 268, 275–76.
19. Ibid., 279.
20. Ibid., 273–74.
21. And, again, I offer a more detailed treatment of the Kabbalah in relation to Hegel in my *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, *op. cit.* There I discuss much more extensively Hegel's own treatment of the Kabbalah, primary Kabbalist texts, and commentaries by scholars other than Scholem.
22. See my *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, *op. cit.*
23. David Walsh, *The Esoteric Origins of Modern Ideological Thought: Boehme and Hegel* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1978), 296.
24. As to the relation of Joachim to Hegel, the similarity between the two was pointed out to Hegel himself in an 1810 letter from the occultist K. J. H. Windischmann. Hegel himself never mentions Joachim. Nevertheless, such contemporary scholars as Clark Butler, Laurence Dickey, Antoine Faivre, Henri de Lubac, Michael Murray, Cyril O'Regan, and Eric Voegelin have argued for a Joachimite influence on Hegel. See Butler, "Hegelian Panentheism and Joachimite Christianity," in *New Perspectives on Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, ed. David Kolb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Laurence Dickey,

Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit 1770–1807 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Antoine Faivre, "Ancient and Medieval Sources of Modern Esoteric Movements," in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, ed. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman (New York, Crossroads, 1995); Henri de Lubac, *La Spiritualité de Joachim de Fiore* (Paris: Sycamore, 1979–1981), vol. 2, 359–77; Michael Murray, *Modern Philosophy of History* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970), 89–113; Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952). I discuss the evidence for Joachim's influence on Hegel at length in *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (op. cit.) with special attention to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

25. The *Kabbala Denudata* (*Kabbalah Unveiled*, 1677–1684) included, among other texts, large excerpts from the Lurianic Kabbalah. It also included an essay by Francis Mercury van Helmont, the alchemist and friend of Leibniz who introduced the Cambridge Platonists More and Cudworth to Kabbalism. The *Kabbala Denudata* made Kabbalism accessible to every educated person in Europe, and affected interpretations of the Kabbalah until the end of the nineteenth century. It is highly likely that Hegel consulted it, at least in preparing his remarks on Kabbalism for the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

26. Oetinger, *Biblisches und emblematisches Wörterbuch* (1776; reprinted, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969), 407. Pagination refers to the original edition.

27. *Ibid.*, 536.

28. Quoted in Gerald Hanratty, "Hegel and the Gnostic Tradition: II," *Philosophical Studies* (Ireland) 31 (1986–87): 301–25, 314; his translation.

29. Benz, *Christian Kabbalah*, 52.

30. See Paola Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jacob Böhme* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 185.

31. Benz, *Mystical Sources*, 54–56.

32. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1980), 211.

33. *Ibid.*, 212.

34. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 14, ed. Karl Friedrich A. Schelling (Stuttgart/Augsburg: J. H. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1856–1861), 205. Quoted in Benz, *Mystical Sources*, 50–51.

35. Oetinger, *Biblisches und emblematisches Wörterbuch*, 407.

36. See Hayden-Roy, op. cit. See also Ulrich Gaier, *Der gesetzliche Kalkül: Hölderlins Dichtungslehre* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1962); Walter Dierauer, *Hölderlin und der Speculative Pietismus Württembergs: Gemeinsame Anschauungshorizonte im Werk Oetingers und Hölderlins* (Zürich: Juris, 1986).

37. Benz writes, "Oetinger was the mediator of cabalistic ideas for the German idealistic philosophers, especially Schelling, who returned often to the Swabian theological sources, with which he had been indoctrinated in his youth during his sojourn as a theological student at the *Stift*, the seminary at Tübingen, and which he called to mind in all the decisive crises of his spiritual and philosophical development." Benz, *Mystical Sources*, 48.

38. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 9 (henceforth *PS*); *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), 13 (henceforth *PG*).

39. *PS* 10; *PG* 14.

40. *PS* 11; *PG* 15.

41. Oetinger, *Sämtliche Schriften*, Vol. 5, ed. Karl Christian Eberhard Ehmman (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1858–1864), 45.

42. In contrast to some Jewish Kabbalists, Oetinger maintained that the Sephiroth were forms or aspects of God's manifestation, not "creatures" of God.

43. See Ignacio Angelelli, review of Niels W. Bokhove, *'Phänomenologie': Ursprung und Hintergrund des Terminus im 18. Jahrhundert* (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1992), in *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1993): 36–62.

44. Robert Schneider, *Schellings und Hegels Schwabische Geistesahnen* (Würzburg: Tiltch, 1938), 56.

45. *Ibid.*, 54; my translation.

46. F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 155.

47. See Hayden-Roy, 69; Robert Schneider, 47.

48. *Wissenschaft der Logik: Das Sein* (1812), ed. Hans-Jürgen Gawoll (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986), 82. Because A. V. Miller bases his translation on the 1832 edition, this passage is missing from his text.

49. See Benz, *Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, op. cit.; Robert Schneider, *Schellings und Hegels Schwabische Geistesahnen*, op. cit.; Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit 1770–1807*, op. cit. The only problem with Dickey's work is that he has almost nothing to say about Swabian speculative pietism and the ideas discussed in this essay.

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